



FALLEN AMONG THIEVES.

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A Novel of "Interest."

BY

ARTHUR À BECKETT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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FALLEN AMONG THIEVES.



CHAPTER VII.

A REAL "SENSATION SCENE."

GREAT was the excitement on board the 'Punjaub.' Actors and actresses were busily engaged in learning their respective parts. Lieutenants were seen all over the ship, striving hard to force into their well-meaning but thick-skulled heads the difficult words set down for them to speak on the night of the performances. Ladies were noticed with books in their hands, smiling and frowning, and repeating sentences over and over again, in the vain endeavour to gain perfection in their different *rôles*. At the dinner-table

dressess were lazily canvassed, and the scenery moodily mentioned.

“I don’t know what we are to do,” cried Mrs. Smith. “You know *so* much depends upon the artist. Will no one come to the rescue? Can no one paint?”

“I say, Harwood,” cried Lieutenant Streater, of the 207th (Royal Fusiliers), from the end of one of the tables, “look here. I’ve seen some awfully jolly pictures in your cabin. I say, you didn’t paint them, did you?”

“If you mean those wretched daubs, supposed by friends to represent a ship in a storm and a windmill in a gale of wind, yes, I did. It wouldn’t be fair to the art to allow that any other man could paint so wretchedly.”

“The very thing!” exclaimed Streater joyfully. “I’ve got an idea.”

“An idea!” cried Thompson. “Let me congratulate you, my dear fellow.”

And Thompson held out his hand to his brother sub. The two men hated one another with a bitterness horrible to witness. Why did they hate one another? I will tell you—they both were amateur actors! It is unhappily a rule of nature that amateur actors *must* hate one another! This is sad, but, alas! too, too true! Ah! at best this poor globe of ours is but a world of jealousies and sorrows!

"What is the idea?" asked Mrs. Smith.

"I will unfold it when Mr. Thompson will permit me," replied Streater, with a scowl at his brother in the dramatic art.

"Pray do! we are all attention."

"Well, I was only going to say, when Mr. Thompson interrupted me, with the politeness for which he is so justly celebrated," began Streater sulkily, "that Mr. Harwood can paint beautiful pictures; why, then, not get Mr. Harwood to paint our scenery?"

The suggestion was received with acclamation.

“I shall make a sad mess of it, I fear,” said Harwood. “I can assure you I scarcely know a brush from a pencil. Not only that; we have a very short time before us, and how am I to attend my rehearsals?”

“Oh, never mind that,” replied Mrs. Smith quickly; “we can easily get some one to read your part for you. You’ll only have to be perfect in your words, and everything will go admirably.”

And so it was decided that the scenery should be painted by Mr. Richard Harwood.

Streater told himself off, to assist the “scenic artist,” and for days the two men worked hard at covering canvas with most of the colours of the rainbow.

The rehearsals were held at all times. Novels were thrown aside, and even flirting went out of fashion. How can you flirt with a woman when she broadly hints at rehearsal that you don’t know your part, and covertly suggests that you are little better than a

rather dangerous idiot? Quarrels and squabbles were of hourly occurrence. Poor young Thompson was for ever throwing up his part, and protesting against the shameful conduct of his rival Streater. "I tell you what, Sir," he would declare after one of these *contre-temps*, "if ladies had not been present, I would have felled him to the ground, Sir. Yes, Sir, felled him to the ground!" Their "mutual friends" (I use the adjective with fear and trembling) would attempt to appease him, and Streater would be brought up to him, with a grim apology upon his (Streater's) lips. And then the rivals would solemnly shake hands, and leave one another with uneasy smiles on their faces, and deadly hatred in their heart of hearts.

The time passed very quickly. When the 'Punjaub' arrived at Aden, numbers of the passengers put off, and that not particularly lively town was searched far and near for "dresses and decorations," as the play-bills

have it. When the ship entered the Red Sea, nearly every one was perfect in his or her part. Even Major Simpson, who played Berthier, required the assistance of the prompter but little; the *rôle* of the "Prince de Neuchâtel" contained about fifteen words, and of these fifteen the gallant officer knew nearly ten! Everybody liked Simpson, he was *so* obliging. There was nothing he wouldn't do to please people. Some of the passengers thought that the good-nature of the Major was inexhaustible. They soon found out their mistake. Simpson drew the line at "whiskers." He was prepared to do anything for the public weal,—to give up his dignity, to appear as a buffoon,—but he would not shave off his beard, even at the solicitation of Stage Manager Streater.

At last the auspicious day arrived. A stage had been fitted up in the saloon, and seats had been placed for the audience in the auditorium. Where the passengers dined

was, and still remains a mystery. The last rehearsal was held, the scenery was set, and everything was ready for the performance. The sun went down, the audience took their seats, and the prompter cleared his throat, preparatory to commencing the arduous duties of the night.

While all was more or less confusion in the Saloon, perfect silence reigned on deck, broken only by the vibrations of the screw. The 'Punjaub' was proceeding on her voyage at a great rate. The sea was perfectly calm, and the ship made her way through the waters like a ghost. The vessel glided along into the darkness, casting round about her as she came a little gleam of light,—a little gleam of light issuing from the port-holes of the cabins; leaving behind her, as she passed away, a froth of water,—a froth of water, which soon languished and died, becoming once more one with the calm blue sea, stretching far, far back into the night.

And thus moved the silent ship, with its living freight, among the dangers of the mighty deep.

By-and-by the Captain of the vessel walked on to the quarter-deck, attended by his Chief Officer. Both men seemed to be engaged in earnest conversation. The junior was apparently trying to persuade his senior that his (the junior's) view of the case was the correct one.

“All you say may be very true, Hardy ; but I tell you this is a very dangerous part of the voyage, and you are new to the line. It's no flattery to say that you are a capital sailor, but, believe me, it would be better for me to take the next watch.”

“I can assure you, Sir, I have studied the chart carefully, and could take the ship through with my eyes shut. Do let me persuade you to go down. I am sure the passengers will be very much hurt if you don't patronize the entertainment. I am

told that young Streater is capital ; I only wish I could see it !”

“But—” began the Captain in an undecided tone.

“I beg pardon, Sir ; but if you think I don’t know my duty, of course I shall submit to your wishes,” said the First Officer, with disagreeable dignity and pinchbeck humility.

“No, Hardy ; I don’t believe that for a moment ; but—”

“Many thanks, Sir,” interrupted the junior. “Then if you do not think me unfit for the appointment I have the honour to hold, I really can see no reason why you should treat me with such marked distrust?”

“Well, well, as you will !” replied the Captain, and with a glance round the ship and a nod to his subordinate, he left the deck and descended into the saloon.

“How absurdly fussy the Captain is ! Danger ! why there will be no danger for

the next six hours. Heigho ! this is slow work," and the First Officer began to walk the deck.

By-and-by the sounds of laughter and applause came floating up from below. Hardy listened to them with ill-disguised impatience.

"What a bore it is ! Here am I tied to my post, and I'm told that Streater is awfully good. I should so like to see him. Egad, too, and I will see him. The Captain is so fussy ; why this part of the voyage, I know from the chart, is perfectly safe. I'll drop down for a few minutes, just have a look at Streater, and then return to my post in time to meet the danger—danger, ha ! ha ! Danger, indeed !"

He called the Fourth Officer to take his place, left the deck, and stealthily made his way down into the Saloon.

The 'Punjaub' moved through the waters into the bosom of the darkness silently and steadily.

The curtain had fallen upon the farce. Streater had been a very great success. He had pulled faces like the late Mr. Wright, and had imitated the voice of the present Mr. Buckstone, and had crowned his waggeries by actually sitting down upon a real bandbox. This last manœuvre had been received with shouts of laughter and delight by the very intelligent audience assembled in the auditorium of the "Theatre Royal Punjaub."

Poor Thompson stood at the wings scowling at his rival with an expression composed of rouge, malice, bismuth, and ferocity. He bit his nails, and murmured savagely, "Ah, wait till these *fools* have seen my De Cevennes!" The "*fools*" had not long to wait, and when they *had* seen it, it puzzled them terribly, as this truthful chronicle will fully testify.

After a very long pause the curtain rose upon 'Plot and Passion.' After Jabot

(kindly assisted by the prompter) had got through his work very creditably, the principal actors appeared upon the scene. The *rôles* (with the exception of "De Cevennes—Mr. Thompson, 207th Royal Fusiliers") were tolerably well filled. The Fouché was rather good than otherwise, and the Desmarets was not very bad. Henri de Neuville was played coldly but carefully by Richard Harwood, and as for the Cicely of Mrs. Lever (the young "grass widow"), what it lacked in intelligence it made up for in diamonds. But *the* success of the evening was the Marie de Fontanges of Miss Ruthven. Edith seemed to feel the part thoroughly, and acted with the greatest spirit. In the scene in which she demands money of her fellow-spy, in order that she may return to the gambling-table, to enjoy once more the mad pleasures of play, her *abandon* was admirable. Long and loud was the applause when the curtain descended on the first act.

The "company" surrounded Edith, and offered her their heartiest congratulations. There was only one who kept apart from the throng, and for whose voice she listened eagerly but without avail. Richard Harwood neither joined in the song of praise nor raised his voice in the all but universal hymn of laudation.

"I really could scarcely have believed that the girl had so much in her," said Mrs. Smith to Mrs. Tremenheere.

"She was certainly very good indeed, but her rouge had been put on so carelessly that she looked a perfect fright," was the reply.

"Is Mr. Streater playing a serious or a comic part?"

"I really can't tell; I've seen the piece before, and I imagine he turns out to be Napoleon, or Robespierre, or somebody of that sort, at the end of the third act."

"He's very funny."

"Very, poor fellow! How miserable he

looked when the prompter forgot to assist him."

"He's a very gentlemanly young man, but I don't think acting's his *forte*."

"Quite so. Really I do so wish we could find out whether he's playing a comic part or not. I'm afraid of laughing, for fear of making a mistake."

"Perhaps we shall see in the next act. But there's the bell for the curtain, so we mustn't talk any more."

The second act opened with the reappearance of Cecile (Marie's maid) in a new dress of the most expensive description, ornamented with the diamonds to which allusion has already been made. After a while, Marie and Henri came before the footlights, and the celebrated love-scene in 'Plot and Passion' was played by the actor and actress. It was not a success. Richard spoke his words with so little feeling that he almost caused a laugh amongst the audience. Edith

blushed through her rouge, and murmured to herself, "Does he hate me so much that he cannot even pretend to love me?" and then her spirits failed her, and she became listless and sad. She seemed to have lost from that moment all her vivacity, and played the rest of the act with evident weariness. When the curtain fell, Edith's popularity had disappeared,—she was voted as bad an actress as her companion, the young "grass widow." Caring very little for the opinion of the audience Edith rested against the wing, waiting for the performances to recommence. As she stood thus she heard a woman's voice; she recognized the tones as the private property of Cicely. She listened.

"Yes, it was a little ambitious of Miss Ruthven to undertake so important a part. You must allow that the task was too great for her."

"Well," she heard Richard reply, "cer-

tainly Miss Ruthven was a little overweighted ; as you say, she might have been better."

Edith's eyes flashed fire, and the tell-tale blood rushed to her cheeks as she murmured, " He thinks I cannot act. I will undeceive him. But no," she added with a sigh ; " it will not be acting !"

At length the curtain rose for the last time, and Edith made her appearance once again. Her cheeks were flushed, and she seemed determined to carry all before her. She had lost her listlessness, and played with an energy that perfectly electrified those who watched her movements. In the grand scene in which Marie asks the pardon of her lover for having unconsciously betrayed him, she became sublime. She seemed to forget that she was playing a part in a piece. She poured her whole soul into her words ; she wept real tears ; her shame at her degradation was not assumed ; her prayer for mercy came from the bottom of her heart.

On her knees she implored Henri to pardon her, to forget the poor spy, and only to remember the wretched and repentant woman.

Richard raised her softly from the ground, and his voice sounded very sweet to her as he coldly granted the petition she had urged with so much earnestness.

At this moment there occurred a dreadful crash, which shook the ship from truck to keelson, and then some doors were thrown open, and the soldiers stood waiting on the stage ready to take Henri away from his mistress to the dreary cells of the Bastille,—perchance to an ignominious death. So excited were the audience with the thrilling situation that they did not notice, for the moment, that the Captain had hurriedly left the cabin for the deck.

The action on the stage continued, when a second crash occurred more dreadful than the first,—a pause, and the actors and actresses stopped talking, and looked from

one to another. A moment later, and there arose a cry of astonishment and fear.

There was a dead silence after this for a moment, and then the Captain entered the Saloon. His face was very pale, but he spoke calmly and firmly. His words were these,—

“Pray be composed. If we keep our heads clear, there may still be life for every one of us. Ladies, get to your prayers, and pray for us. You gentlemen, follow me, I have work for you to do.”

As he returned to the deck, a passenger asked him what was the matter. He answered in a low tone,—

“The ‘Punjaub’ has struck upon a rock. May God have mercy upon us all !”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD HALL-CLOCK TURNS TRAITOR.

WE travel back again to England. A hot summer's day in the little village of Stelstead. Samson was absent from his shop; there was a grand match going on in the field belonging to the Grammar School,—the old cobbler always acted as umpire on behalf of the scholars. Round the cricket-ground were seated several members of the various county families who took an interest in the school; and what with the fine day, and gauzy dresses, and tiny bonnets, and fresh pretty faces, the sight, as a whole, was a

pleasant one to gaze upon. Every now and then a shout of boyish voices told that a good "hit" had been made, and on these occasions, the face of the old umpire lighted up with satisfaction. When a wicket fell, Samson had a word of comfort for the man "put out."

"You played that innings as well as ever I see you, Master Carter," the old fellow would say as the boy prepared to leave the ground.

"I should have done better, Jas, if it hadn't been for those beastly 'sneaks.' Who *could* play such bowling as *that*?" and with a glance of hearty contempt at his conqueror, the young cricketer would surrender his place at the wicket to one of his allies.

Of course Florence was on the ground, and again, as a matter of course, she had several admirers in attendance. Young country gentlemen, finishing their education at Oxford and Cambridge, gawky youths

from Eton, and conceited Queen's Scholars from Westminster surrounded her. It was amusing to watch her as she played off one lad against the other,—sending this one to find out the score for her, another to fetch her an ice, a third to look for her scent-bottle (supposed to have been left in the carriage), a fourth to carry a message to one of her girlish friends, and so on and so on. She had a smile for every one, and caused a general feeling of jealousy among the fair sex assembled on the greensward in front of the tent.

“Who is that young lady you're bowing to?” asked a man standing beside one of the carriages.

“Oh! Florence Ruthven—an awful flirt,” was the answer, and the rosy lips of the speaker pressed themselves into a pout of pretty contempt. “Do you think her handsome?”

“Not at all; blonde isn't my style; I pre-

fer brunette," and he looked into a pair of dark brown eyes. In spite of this, his attention wandered away every now and then to the brilliant Florence in the distance.

The game continued, and the trees began to throw shadows on the grass, when a horseman rode on to the ground. He looked round the field, dismounted, and gave over his mare to one of the village lads. Then with a smile upon his face he walked up to Florence, and held out his hand. She took it within her own, and blushed deeply ; then she said in her usual manner, "Oh, Mr. Holston, I am *so* glad to see you. Where have you come from?"

"I am staying at Grange Court, Miss Florence. I called at the house, found you were here, and *me voici*."

"Are you staying at Grange Court long?"

"For a week or ten days." He had taken up his position beside her, and, with perfect *sang froid* and politeness, had already snubbed

the crowd of admirers in attendance upon her. Florence, now that Freddy had arrived, had, with charming ease, dismissed the lesser attractions. Boys from Eton and Westminster were all very well when there were no men to flirt with. Freddy smiled as the little crowd disappeared, and the two were left alone. He turned to Florence and said—

“Ah, Flo, you are a sad flirt.”

“I don’t understand you, Mr. Holston,” replied Florence, turning red; “and please don’t call me Flo.”

“Why not?”

“Because my name is Miss Ruthven.”

“Why, what have I done?”

“What have you done! What right had you to write me those letters? I had half a mind to show them to my uncle.”

“Well, what if you had? I only told you the truth. Now what did I say in them to offend you?”

“Why you told me you loved me, and all that nonsense.”

“Did that offend you?”

“No,—I mean yes. Not only that, you know it was a story. You only care for one person in the world.”

“Really! And who may that be?”

“Yourself.”

“On my word, Miss Ruthven (if you won't let me call you Flo), you are too hard upon me. You really are,” said Freddy with a smile and a stroke of his moustache.

“What will make you believe me when I tell you that I love you?”

“Nothing.”

“May I hang myself?”

“No.”

“Shall I take poison? I should rather like to take poison. And I could manage it so easily. My wine merchant has some very peculiar sherry, which he is always trying to sell me. Say ‘yes,’ and I will order in

a dozen to-morrow. Please let me poison myself."

"Don't be so absurd. I am really very angry with you."

"Not really?"

"Yes, really."

"What about?"

"Why, of course about those letters. You know you oughtn't to write to me. As I have said before, I very nearly gave them over to my uncle."

"Well, if you didn't give them over, what *did* you do with them?"

Florence was silent.

"Did you burn them?"

"No."

"Did you tear them up?"

"No."

"Then what did you do with them?"

Florence's eyes sought the ground, and then she said in a low tone,—

"I kept them."

“It’s all right,” thought Freddy, and he added aloud, “Well, I’m awfully sorry to have made you angry even for a moment. But you forgive me now,—don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“May I call you Flo? You may call me Freddy if you like. *I* don’t mind it.”

Florence laughed merrily at this, and said, “Well, if you *must* be rude, I suppose I must submit to it, especially as you are to be our guest at dinner this evening.”

“Yes. Sir Ralph was kind enough to ask me to stay to dine.”

“Very well, then I think we had better be leaving. Will you find the carriage, please?”

Freddy started off on this errand. In a very short time he returned, and handed Florence to her seat. Throwing the lad, who had held his horse, sixpence, he mounted the animal, and the carriage and its escort left the ground.

As they passed by the gate, an old man uncovered his head. Florence blushed crimson as she encountered the old man's gaze.

"Who was that?" asked Freddy.

"Samson, the village shoemaker," replied Florence, with evident uneasiness.

"He stared at you very rudely."

"Oh dear no; he is the dearest of old creatures, and a *great* favourite of mine."

"I don't like the look of the fellow," said the young man, turning his head towards the cobbler.

Jas Samson met Freddy Holston's stern glance without flinching.

On this hot summer's afternoon there had been one lazy man in the village, or rather at the Hall. A very lazy man, for he had dozed under the trees of the park, and wandered listlessly by the side of the stream. Tired of even this exercise, he strolled back to the House, entered the hall, opened the

large window, and leaning his elbows on the sill, began to whistle. Quickly fatigued by this exertion, he next turned his back upon the light, and, still resting against the casement, began to stare at the loud-ticking hall-clock which was now facing him.

“You are a queer old piece of furniture, I do think,” said he, “a puzzlin’ bit of furniture. On that occasion (oh, you know well enough the occasion I mean) you made out my old watch to be a liar. Now my watch never told a lie in its life, and even *you* allowed it was telling the truth the next morning. It’s a strange business, and I can’t make it out anyhow.”

He looked lazily at the clock, and his eyes began to close. He fell off to sleep, and was recalled to consciousness by slipping from the window to the ground.

“I am awfully tired,” he said with a long yawn; “perhaps a pipe might wake me up

a bit. I'll light it 'ere, jump through the winder, and go to smoke it in the kitchen-garden. I may as well light it 'ere, 'cause Sir Ralph is in 'is study, and Miss Florence is away looking at them cricketers."

Expressing his opinion, in rather strong language, about games in general and cricket in particular, he drew out his pipe, and proceeded to fill it up with tobacco.

"Now," said he, "how am I to light it? I 'ate lighting a pipe from a lucifer,—you draws in so much sulphur. I wish I could find a bit of paper."

He searched in his pockets, but could find nothing. Then he looked about the hall, but still his efforts were unsuccessful. At last, as a *dernier ressort*, he opened the case of the clock. There was a heap of dust at the bottom, which had evidently been the collection of months.

"Mary 's a nice girl, I do think," said the man in a tone of disgust. "Why, she

don't take the trouble to carry away all this mess, but just sweeps it in here, and shuts the door !”

He moved the little heap with his foot, and at the bottom he saw two pieces of paper. With an exclamation of pleasure he daintily picked them out. Then returning to the window, he produced a match from his waistcoat pocket. He was about to strike it, when a name on one of the papers caught his eye. He smoothed both of them out, and an expression of intense astonishment spread over his face as he slowly learned the meaning of the writing. He read the papers carefully, and, on comparing them, found that they had been written by the same hand.

“ This is luck,” he cried ; “ why if I play my cards well, these 'ere pieces of paper will make my fortin for me.”

The first piece of paper was a letter written in faded ink.

The second piece of paper was an envelope that had once contained the first.

* * * * *

By this time the carriage bringing Florence from the cricket-field had arrived at the hall door. Freddy sprang from his horse, and assisted the girl to alight. As man and maid entered the house, John Dixon stood knocking at the portals of the library.

"Come in," cried a weak voice from within.

"Beg pardon, Sir Ralph," said Dixon roughly, "but can I speak with you?"

"No,—not now," replied the baronet, "I am busy ; any other time will do."

"Any other time will *not* do," retorted the servant insolently.

"What do you mean, fellow?"

"That I 'ave got something to say to you, Sir Ralph Ruthven, Barrownite, which you'll 'ave to listen to. Mind, I advises you as a

friend. Don't make an enemy of me, Sir Ralph. On my word of honour you can't afford to do it !”

“ Is the man drunk ?” cried Sir Ralph in the last stage of astonishment.

“ No, Sir Ralph Ruthven, Barrownite, the man is *not* drunk. The ‘ man ’ ’as been a many years in your service, Sir Ralph, and you never seed ’im drunk, I know. The ‘ man ’ was in your service on the night of the murder, and he wasn’t drunk then.”

At the word “ murder,” the baronet turned pale, and looked hard at his servant, as if he would read his heart of hearts.

“ What do you want ?” he asked in a milder tone than that he had used at the commencement of the interview.

“ What do I want ? Ah ! come, that’s better, Sir Ralph Ruthven, Barrownite. You’re getting more polite ; you’ll be politer still before I’ve done with yer.”

“ Well, well ; state your business with me, and then get you begone.”

“I said afore, Sir Ralph Ruthven, Barrownite, as ’ow I’ve been a long time in your service.”

“Well?”

“I was in your service on the night of the murder.”

No answer.

“I was up that there night.”

No answer.

“So was you, Sir Ralph Ruthven, Barrownite.”

Still no answer.

“On that there night I lost something—a night’s rest,” he laughed at this jest insolently; “and didn’t you lose something that there night, Sir Ralph,—besides your night’s rest, Sir Ralph?”

The baronet shook his head.

“You are mistaken, Sir Ralph Ruthven, Barrownite. You lost these two pieces of paper.”

And Dixon held up the letter and enve-

lope he had found in the clock case. The letter was signed "GEORGE RAYMOND." The envelope was addressed "To LADY RUTHVEN."

CHAPTER IX.

LIFE OR DEATH ?

BACK once more to the deck of the doomed 'Punjaub.' The morning was breaking, the long night had passed, and still the ship braved the rush of the sea. The men had pumped for dear life through the darkness, but the leaks had increased, the water had gained upon them, and all hope had died in the heart of the Captain. Sad and weary, and some of them clothed in the fantastic dresses they had worn overnight, the passengers still obeyed the orders of the officers of the ship with alacrity. Their conduct

contrasted strongly with that of the crew. It had become known that the vessel was slowly but surely sinking, and the sailors were murmuring at their work. Some wished to seize the boats, while others looked with thirsty eyes at the spirit closet. After a consultation with his Second in Command, the Captain called the passengers round him.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “it would be madness to stay on the ‘Punjaub’ an hour longer. The ship, in spite of all our efforts, is sinking. The leaks are too great to give us any hope of saving the vessel. The crew are already demoralized, and if we delay may soon become unmanageable. Under these circumstances, we had better take to the boats.”

This speech was listened to in a dead silence. The order was given to abandon the ship, and soon all was confusion on board. Women and children were lowered

into their places ; provisions were hastily collected and thrown into the different boats. Soon, very soon, the Captain had seen every living creature on deck leave the ship, and then, but not till then, he abandoned her himself. In a moment more the ‘Punjaub’ was deserted, and the boats were becoming small in the distance. Fortunately the ill-fated ship had been well supplied with means by which an escape could be effected. In spite of the numbers of the passengers and crew, a spare boat was drawn along in tow. This boat contained no man or woman, and had been brought away from the vessel to serve as a refuge in the case of accident. The men at the oars pulled steadily, and the expedition made good progress.

“Stop,” cried the voice of the Captain.
“Is Miss Ruthven with us ?”

The question was passed from one boat to the rest, and the answer given back to the Captain was “No.”

“Great Heaven!” he cried, “we have left her to drown. What is to be done?”

“If you will lend me that boat, Captain, I will return to the vessel. If I can save the lady I will,” said one of the passengers calmly.

“Remember the risk you run. You are nearly certain of arriving too late, or of reaching the vessel in time to sink with her. Weigh this well before you decide.”

“I have decided. If you will lend me the extra boat, Captain, I will return.”

* * * * *

When the order came from the Captain to desert the ship, Edith hurried down to the cabin of her aunt. When she arrived at the door she found it locked. She cried out that the vessel was sinking, that every moment had its value, and implored Lady Ruthven to turn the key in the lock. The reply was a burst of meaningless laughter.

“I am dressing, Edith,” the old woman

croaked out, "and I know you want to prevent me from doing my face. You are jealous of me,—you know you are!"

And then the poor creature began to whimper. Edith knelt at the door, and prayed with all the earnestness of her soul to Heaven to save the miserable woman,—to give her one gleam of reason, that she might appreciate and understand her great danger. After this she cried once more to her to open the door.

"No, no, no!" said the querulous voice. "No, no, no! You are jealous of me. You want me to look as pale as a ghost,—you know you do!"

"For the love of Heaven, Aunt, understand me. The ship is sinking. I tell you we shall be lost if we don't leave it immediately."

Still the mad chuckle, and the words, "You are jealous of me, you know you are!"

Then Edith exerted all her strength, and tried to break open the door, but without avail. But the attempt had furnished her with an idea. She determined to return to the deck, to ask the assistance of some passengers. Hurriedly leaving the Saloon, with its stage and scenery, which seemed a fearful mockery now that the hour of danger—perchance death—had arrived, she soon reached her destination.

When she stood once more with the blue sky above her, she raised her eyes to heaven in prayer, then she looked round the ship. For a moment she seemed not to comprehend her terrible situation. The ship had been deserted,—the boats containing the crew were already out of sight! For a moment, I say, she stood as one bereft of all sense and feeling; then poor human nature gave way, and, with a desponding cry, she fell fainting to the deck.

The ship rolled heavily in the sea. The

time passed slowly, and the old woman in the cabin continued to "make up" her face, and to laugh to herself. "She is jealous of me," she murmured, "and why not? when I am dressed I look as young and as pretty; I know I do! Now for the rouge,—there!"

On deck Edith still lay in a trance, but not for long. After a while, when the ship was rolling heavily in the waves, a man sprang up the side of the vessel, and seized the lifeless form of the girl in his arms. With the celerity of lightning he retraced his steps, and regained the boat he had left to board the 'Punjaub.'

Gently ridding himself of his burden, he shoved vigorously off, and took to his oars. He had not pulled a score of strokes ere an unearthly cry rang in his ears,—a cry of horrible despair, of untold anguish.

His face was turned towards the ship, and he saw, standing on the quarter-deck, a weird-looking figure. It was the figure of

an old woman, who carried in her skinny hand a powder-puff, in the other a toilet-glass. The woman uttered another piercing shriek, and threw up her arms in an agony of fear, the ship gave one more lurch, sank, and the waters of the Red Sea closed over the deck and masts of the 'Punjaub' for evermore !

* * * * *

"Where am I?"

"With me."

"Leopold Lawson!" Edith burst into tears, and seized his hand and kissed it.

"You have saved my life!" she cried.

"Oh, you have saved my life!"

"I have done no more than my duty as a Christian," he answered coldly.

"And my aunt?"

"Is at rest for ever. Heaven has taken pity upon her."

He pulled away in silence, and the frail boat seemed to fly along. Soon spots ap-

peared in the distance,—in a few minutes they grew into the shape of tiny crafts. When he saw that his approach had been noticed by those who manned the still distant boats, he took up his oars and looked his companion full in the face. “Edith Ruthven,” he said, “the time has arrived for an explanation.”

She was silent.

“You know,” he continued, “the secret of my life. You know that I live but to avenge my father’s death, to clear my father’s memory. I have worked for years ; I have passed through misery and privation ; I have never complained, because I have always had my end in view,—have never forgotten my mission. Heaven helps me on the road to justice, fills my purse, and gives me the means of fulfilling my vow ! And now I meet you—you who stole the heart of Florence from me—you who have been my bad genius ! Not satisfied with the

wrongs you had already done me, you must needs add another to the list. You must steal my secret, as you stole away, years ago, the happiness of my life!"

"Oh, Leopold, Leopold!" murmured Edith; "you have saved me from death, don't speak to me thus!"

"Yes; I have saved you, and you owe me some return. Make the balance even; let there be no debt. Listen, Edith Ruthven, listen to my terms!"

"Oh, Leopold, Leopold, do not speak to me so coldly. You have saved my life, and—"

She would have taken his hand, but he repulsed her roughly. It was too hard to bear! Edith's proud nature revolted against the insult; from that moment she returned coldness for coldness.

"What are your terms?" she asked.

"I require more than silence," he said.
"You wished to be my tyrant, you shall

serve as my slave. I require you now to swear to me that you will obey my commands in every respect as if you were indeed my bondswoman. You would have thwarted me,—now you must help me in my plans.”

The boats were coming nearer. Edith, cold and scornful, answered him with these words,—

“And if I refuse? I suppose you will murder me. You know we have families of executioners,—why, then, may not assassination be hereditary?”

The boats were coming nearer.

“No, Edith Ruthven, I wish you to live, not to die,” he said; and there was sadness in his voice as he continued, “If you refuse to take the vow I have proposed, it will be for me to die, not for you. I live but to keep my oath. You have the power to thwart my plans. Life has no pleasure for me if you oppose me successfully, and know-

ing what you do, and using what you know, you *will* be successful. I have lost my love, and life only is dear to me as long as I am able to clear the memory of my father." He rose up in the boat. "Edith Ruthven, give me your answer. Let me know whether I am to die or to live!"

He stood calmly looking in the water. As he faced Death, the cheers of the people in the boats were wafted across the waters to his ears, welcoming him back to life and hope.

He placed one foot on the side of the boat, and said calmly, "Edith Ruthven, I wait for your answer."

She sprang to her knees, and clasping his hands in her own, cried, with her eyes swimming in tears, and her voice broken with emotion,

"Oh, Leopold, Leopold, I cannot let you die!"

The Story.

BOOK II.—THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

CHAPTER I.

FREDDY MAKES A FRIEND.

IN a luxuriously-furnished room, a table stood ready laid for breakfast. A bachelor's room, with fine water-colour pictures hanging to the lavender-painted walls, with comfortable settees, and still more comfortable lounging-chairs, with books and knick-knacks, and looking-glasses, with tapestry hanging before the door, and heavy velvet curtains hiding the fireplace. A large French window opened upon a balcony well-stocked with flowers and evergreens. On the floor of the room was spread a velvet-pile carpet ;

under the mantelpiece, with its bronze clock and candlesticks, lay the skin of a tiger, flooded with the sunshine, which poured in through the open window; behind the bronze clock and candlesticks hung a looking-glass, decorated with a hundred cards of invitation. A number of breechloaders and a pair of foils were arranged as a trophy over one of the two doors to the room, and a group of paddles, spears, and tomahawks appeared as a pendant over the other. It was a comfortable apartment, certainly, and told eloquently of the taste of its tenant. Assuredly, to judge from appearances, the proprietor of so much luxury must have been rich, young, travelled, and athletic.

The room contained but one occupant: a staid, neat-handed valet, who moved silently from table to chairs, arranging this, and putting that into its proper place. Soon one of the doors opened, and a young man, with light brown beard and whiskers, and a per-

fectly white head of hair, walked in, and threw himself into an easy-chair. The new-comer wore a lounging-suit, and smoked a cigarette.

“ Well, Larkins, have you found out anything for me ?”

“ Yes, Sir,” replied the servant, in answer to his master’s question : “ the gentleman’s lived here these two years. He never gets up till twelve, and generally walks in with the morning milk.”

“ Anything more ?”

“ They tell me, Sir, that he’s uncommon fast ; belong’s to Sir Hawk Vulture’s set ; he’s a member of the Dartmoor Club, and plays heavily. He gets a lot of wine and pictures, too, from Mr. Moses Melchisideck’s.”

“ Really ?”

“ Yes, Sir ; you don’t hear much good of him anywhere. He was in a great rage this morning, just before you came in, Sir ; I heard him swearing at his man on the staircase like anything.”

“What was the matter?”

“Well, Sir, I believe his man dropped the breakfast things. It *was* provoking, certainly, but *his* swearing was horrible. He said he was in a hurry. He won’t get much by his bad language, though; I know his man,—he’s a surly fellow, and will be sure to take his time about getting another breakfast ready.”

“Just give me my card-case and the pen-and-ink, and—yes, you may lay another place at the table.”

The man brought the inkstand and the card-case, and placed them in front of the speaker.

“Thanks; now get another plate, tumbler, and cup and saucer.”

The servant left the room to obey his master’s orders.

“A lucky chance,” said the young man when he was alone. “Now’s the time to make the fellow’s acquaintance.”

He drew out a card from the case, and scribbled on the back of it, "Dear Sir,—I hear from my servant that you have had an accident with your breakfast. Permit me, as a neighbour, to offer you a share of my own. If it is of the slightest convenience to you, pray do not hesitate to accept my offer for a moment. Yours very faithfully, RICHARD HARWOOD." When Larkins re-entered the apartment with the additional crockery, he gave him the card, and said,—

"Kindly take this up to Mr. Holston, with my compliments."

"Yes, Sir," and the man prepared to leave the room.

"Stay a second, Larkins. By the bye, do you know whether Mr. Holston has made any inquiries about me?"

"Yes, Sir," replied Larkins with a smile, "his man was pumping me all last night."

"And you told him?"

"What you told me I might tell him,

Sir,—that you was very rich, and had made a fortune in Australia.”

“Quite right, Larkins; and now you may go.”

“Yes, Sir,” and the man left the room for the second time.

Leopold waited the arrival of his visitor impatiently. “Will he recognize me?” he murmured; “no,” he added, looking into the glass, “that face has changed greatly since—” he finished the sentence with a sigh. “I wonder if the detectives will be of any use to me,—they make sad bungles now-a-days.” He took up the ‘Times,’ and began to read one of the leaders. With the print before him, and his thoughts far away, he leant back upon his chair in a fit of abstraction. By-and-by he raised his eyes from the page, and gave a start of surprise.

Freddy Holston was standing before him; he had been regarding him for the last three minutes.

“Really, I must thank you very much indeed,” began Harwood’s guest, “for the kind way in which you have asked me to breakfast. I accept your invitation with infinite pleasure, especially as it gives me an opportunity of making your acquaintance.”

The two men confronted one another. Richard, or rather Leopold, thought, “How I hate that man,—how I hate that man!” And Freddy thought, “I have seen that fellow’s face before,—somewhere,” but they said nothing, and only smiled.

Leopold pointed to a chair, and begged his visitor to be seated.

“Do you know,” said Freddy, glancing round the room, and noting down the evidence of wealth, “I am very glad that you have broken through the cold walls of idiotic etiquette, and have made my acquaintance. Neighbours ought to know one another, and be friends.”

“Quite so,” assented Leopold.

“You have recently returned from Australia, I understand?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know many people over heaw?”

“Not a great number,—in fact, scarcely any one.”

“Ah, when we know one another a little better, I trust I shall be able to be of some service to you. I know shoals of people.”

“Thanks, very much,—you really are very good.”

“Not at all, not at all,” said Freddy, with an air of the supremest patronage. “It’s easy enough to get into society over heaw, if you’re a gentleman, and have enough to live on. *A propos*, did you read the account of the shipwreck of one of the P. and O. boats?”

“Yes; I believe there was something about it in the papers?”

“Strange affair, that shipwreck, wasn’t it? Fancy going down in smooth water. Awful idea, wasn’t it?”

“Yes,—I happened to be on board the ‘Punjaub’ at the time of the disaster.”

“By jingo, you don’t say so ! then you must have known the Ruthvens ?”

“Yes, slightly,”

“Oh, they’re great friends of mine ; old woman painted, but was amusing. Poor creature, she sank with the ship, didn’t she ?

“Yes.”

“How did you escape ?”

“Oh, we took to the boats in time. Lady Ruthven was left accidentally on board. Her absence was not discovered until it was too late to save her.”

“Really, — poor creature. You were picked up by a steamer, weren’t you ?”

“Yes, we were very lucky ; we were not a day on the open sea.”

“Rather a bore, a shipwreck, I should say ?”

“Yes, it was rather a bore.”

“Do you know, I think we shall be great friends,” said Freddy, with another look round the room.

“I hope so, I am sure,” replied Leopold, with a slight smile.

“You are eating nothing !”

“Thanks. To tell the truth, I breakfasted some time ago.”

“I hope I have put you to no great inconvenience?”

“Oh, dear no ; I was only accounting for my not breaking bread with you. You know the old Arab custom ?”

“Some nonsense or other, I suppose.”

“An Arab never breaks bread with an enemy.”

“Ha, ha !” laughed Freddy, “those kind of customs are out of date. If I had to ask all my friends to break bread with me, I should be ruined in a week. It’s true, though you’re a millionaire, and I am a poor devil, with scarce a couple of hundred a year to bless myself with.”

“And yet you seem to live tolerably comfortably,” observed Leopold, with a smile.

“Ah, every fellow has his enemies, and I suppose you have heard some stories about me,” said Freddy, with a flushed face; “hang it all, if a fellow is lucky, it’s the fault of the cards, isn’t it,—it’s not *his* crime?”

“Undoubtedly,” replied Leopold, rather drily.

“Are you fond of the Opera?” asked Freddy, hastening to change the subject.

“Yes, I like to listen to good music.”

“Which do you prefer, before or behind the curtain?”

“I don’t quite catch your meaning.”

“Oh, you colonists are delightfully simple; your virtue is quite refreshing, on my soul it is,” said Freddy in a bantering tone. “Why I mean, of course, do you care for the ballet?”

“Not much !”

“I have here in my locket a charming little face,—on my soul, I’m really awfully fond of the little woman. The only thing against it is, it’s so deuced expensive ;” and Freddy opened a locket, and passed it over to Leopold.

With a smile the young man took the charm, and glanced at its contents. The moment his eyes encountered the face looking up at him from the enamel, his cheek suddenly blanched, and his forehead was in a second covered with cold perspiration. With an almost superhuman effort he mastered his emotion, and returned the locket to its owner. Before closing it, Freddy looked down at the portrait.

“By Jove !” he cried, with a slight start, “I have shown you the wrong picture,—Leonie must be in my turquoise locket. This is—”

“Who ?” asked Leopold, trembling from head to foot.

“Well, on second thoughts, perhaps I oughtn’t to tell you,” replied Freddy with a short laugh. “Let’s call her Florence,—never mind her surname. Enough to say, she’s waiting to marry me. I have talked the matter over with Leonie, but I don’t think she likes the idea; women are so idiotic about some things, you know. Hallo, why you look quite pale,—what’s the matter with you?”

“Nothing—nothing,” said Leopold, with an effort. “In Australia I was always subject to fainting fits. I don’t feel very well.”

“Can’t I do anything for you?”

“No, thanks; I shall be all right soon.”

“Lie down for an hour or so. Good-bye. A million thanks for your kind hospitality. I am *so* sorry you are ill.”

Freddy held out his hand, but Leopold seemed not to see it; at least he made no effort to grasp the outstretched palm. In a moment more Freddy had left the room.

When he was left alone, Leopold staggered to the side-board, and poured himself out a glass of brandy. He drank it greedily, and then returned to the breakfast-table.

“Good God!” he cried, “I cannot let it be. I must,—I WILL save her!”

He sat down at his desk, and hurriedly wrote a letter; then he rang the bell, and, when Larkins appeared, told him to take the note to the post.

As the servant left the room he read the superscription on the envelope. The letter was addressed to

“MISS RUTHVEN,

Stelstead Park,

Near Braintree, Essex,”

and was marked “Immediate.”

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST STEP.

THE day succeeding his interview with Freddy Holston, Leopold Lawson made his way to the Temple in search of the chambers of Mr. Marcus Perks, the young barrister who, it may be remembered, defended the prisoner in the Raymond Murder case. After asking the janitor, who kept guard over the door that led into Fleet Street, the way, our hero (for so we may consider him for want of a better) soon discovered the spot sacred to the young barrister and his books. The staircase was rather new, and

the name of "Mr. Marcus Perks," written on the wall in black letters on a white ground, was *very* new—painfully new. Ah! youth may be all very well in poetry, but when we come to the business of this wretched life, youth resolves itself into a perpetual nuisance. Stop, I recall my verdict—on consideration, I don't mind expunging the word "perpetual." I once knew a young, and consequently struggling author, who declared that if ever he were rich enough to afford the expense of a valet, he would select Clarkson, the eminent theatrical wig-maker, for the situation,—always supposing that the said eminent theatrical wig-maker would condescend to accept the lucrative and honourable appointment. He said, in explanation of his plan, "that Clarkson would be able to 'get him up' as an old man every morning before business hours, and thus turn his youthful face into the very picture of venerable respectability."

I laughed at him at the time, but experience has taught me since that there was a good deal of method in his madness.

Leopold ascended the stairs, and on the top floor found a door bearing a like inscription to that painted at the base of the building; the same words, "MR. MARCUS PERKS," were repeated here, only in letters that looked even newer than the very new letters airing themselves on the wall just thirty feet below. Leopold seized the knocker, and sent a "rat-tat" echoing down the whitewashed ceiling to the staircase. After a few minutes' delay, a very small boy opened the door slowly, and waited lazily to hear what the visitor had to say for himself.

"Are these Mr. Perks' chambers?"

"Yes, Sir," answered the small boy drowsily; "I am Mr. Perks' clerk."

"Is your mast'—he'm—your employer in?"

“Yes, Sir, but he’s very much engaged with a client just at present. Can I do anything for you,—is it private or public?”

As the boy said this, sounds of distant laughter were wafted from the chambers out on to the staircase.

“No, thanks, — but I’m in no hurry. Perhaps you will kindly take in my card.”

“Certainly, Sir,” and the boy re-entered the chambers, and walked towards the door of a distant room. As the clerk opened the door, after a gentle knock, Leopold heard a distant voice say,

“Look here, old fellow, I’m not taking up your time, eh? Not interfering with business?” And another distant voice reply,

“Business be hanged! Help yourself to another glass of sherry, old man, and go on. You were saying that you took hold of the bell handle, when you saw a bobby looking at you. Yes?”

At this moment the clerk gave his message. There was a little mumbling, and then the boy closed the door and returned to the visitor standing on the threshold.

“Please, Sir,” said the boy of law, “Mr. Perks is very much engaged with a most important case, but if you will step into one of the waiting-rooms for five minutes he will see you directly.”

The youth then ushered Leopold into a sort of den and left him. After a while he heard Perks (who had evidently disposed of the important case) bidding his client good-bye, and then he was shown by the learned child into “the presence.”

Perks’ room was like himself,—it was young. There were new law-books, and new furniture, and new briefs. The only thing old in the place was a meerschaum pipe (resting on the bran-new mantelpiece) and even that had been newly lighted. The master of the apartment was apparently very

hard at work at some new papers on a new desk.

“Pardon me,” he said, looking up from his writing and pointing to a new chair, “I will be at your disposal in a second.”

Perks frowned at his new papers, rested his head on his right hand (which was supported by the elbow resting on the desk) stared hard at the ceiling, and then wrote rapidly for a couple of seconds or so. After he had repeated this manœuvre for a few minutes, he laid down his pen, turned round on his chair towards Leopold, stretched out his legs, and exclaimed,

“Now, my dear Sir, what can I do for you?”

“I think, Mr. Perks, that you were engaged in the case of *Regina versus Lawson*?”

“Very possibly; if you will allow me I will refer to my clerk.”

Upon this he struck a bell, and waited

for the appearance of the official in question. When the legal urchin put in an appearance, Perks said,—

“Tommy,—hem, I mean Campbell,—were we in the case of Regina *versus* Lawson?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“You are *quite* sure? If not, you had better refer to your book.”

“Oh, I know we was, Sir. It was just before I came, and since then we’ve only been in—”

“Never mind,” interrupted Perks, with a slight frown. “Now that I think of it, I perfectly remember the case. You can go.”

The baby lawyer retired, and the two young men were once more *tête à tête*.

“Hem,” continued Perks. “Yes, it was a singular case. I very nearly got a verdict, but the evidence was too strong against the poor devil. I knew the jury would bring him in guilty before I took the brief. If

I'd been on the jury myself, I should have helped them to do it."

"And yet he was innocent," said Leopold rather impatiently.

"Really!" replied Perks, staring at his visitor through his eye-glass. "Perhaps you were interested in the convict; if so, pray pardon me if I have (unintentionally I assure you) said anything that—"

"I was his son!"

Perks settled himself in his chair, and stared all the more.

"I was his son, Sir," continued Leopold more calmly; "and I have come to ask you, as an honest man, to help me to prove my father's innocence."

Perks looked rather uneasy and murmured, "I am sure I shall be only too happy." He went on in a louder tone, "But are you quite sure that you are wise? Mind, it was only a case of circumstantial evidence; purely circumstantial, nothing was *proved*."

Unhappily the case has been tried and—hem—disposed of. I see you have changed your name. Don't you think you had better allow the past to bury the past?"

"I cannot; I have a duty to perform; I must find my father's murderer."

Perks rose from his chair, and walked uneasily from one end of the room to the other. This he repeated twice or thrice, and then he stopped and addressed Leopold.

"My dear Sir," he said, "pray take my advice. Don't pursue this purpose. I can assure you that it *can*, it *will* do no good. Suppose you hunt down the wretched man; well, and what then? You will only sacrifice another life. Don't think me a prig if I tell you that vengeance belongs to God and not to man."

"You mean what you say kindly," replied Leopold in a moved voice, "and I thank you heartily for your goodness, but I tell you once more that I *must* find out

my father's assassin,—that, please God, I *will*."

Perks stopped his walk, threw himself into his chair, and said in a dissatisfied voice,—

"Well, Sir, what can I do for you?"

"You were my father's counsel. Will you oblige me with a copy of the brief you received in the trial?"

Perks struck the bell once more, and when Campbell entered the room, asked for "the brief packet." The embryo lord chief justice looked a little surprised, became invisible, but instantly reappeared with a very small bundle of papers. Perks took the bundle, hastily looked through it, and handed the desired paper over to Leopold, who rose, thanked the young barrister for his courtesy, and walked towards the door.

"Wait a moment, Sir," said Marcus, whose features displayed at once displeasure and kind-heartedness in a sort of facial salad.

“Are you quite sure that you think you are right?”

“Quite sure.”

“And quite certain that you will go on with this case?”

“Quite certain.”

“Well, then, perhaps I had better help you. After all, you are only clearing your father’s name, and if he was dealt with unfairly, it’s your duty to society to find out the real murderer; isn’t it?”

Leopold bowed.

“Besides that,” said Perks, “if you will permit me to say so, I like you. If I could be of service to you I would. Sit down again, and let me think it over.”

Leopold obeyed with a smile, and when the two young men were once more seated, Perks commenced,—

“Have you done anything yet about the matter, Mr. Harwood?”

“Well, yes; I went to Mr. Bobbarty’s Private Inquiry Office.”

“Bobbarty ! the greatest ruffian unchanged. He will never be of any use to you. Look here ; I know an uncommonly sharp detective (really a clever fellow). If you like, I will get him to take up the case for you. He will be rather expensive, and I don’t suppose he will come up quite to the standard of the police who figure in Miss M. E. Bradon’s novels. But I am sure he will do his best, and has an uncommonly good head to help him to do it. His name is Barman, and he lives in the King’s Road, Chelsea. If you like him, I will send him that brief, and see what he will do with it.”

“I shall only be too glad to take your advice,” said Leopold, handing back the paper.

“Very well ; he shall have it to-night.”

Leopold rose and thanked Perks warmly for his kindness.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” said the barrister, with a smile and a blush. “To tell you the

truth, I have plenty of time,—rather too much time on my hands. I shall be very glad to assist you in any way that lies in my power.”

The two young men shook hands, and separated. The next day an envelope was put into Leopold’s hands by his servant. The envelope contained two letters. The first ran as follows:—

“ ——— *Buildings, Temple.*

“MY DEAR SIR,—I enclose a letter I have just received from Barman. I advise you strongly to take the fellow’s advice.

“Hoping that your interview will not prove barren in results,

“Believe me in great haste (I am hurrying off to attend a rehearsal of some private theatricals),

“Yours very truly,

“MARCUS PERKS.

“R. Harwood, Esq.”

The second was to this effect:—

“ —, *King's Road, Chelsea.*

“DEAR SIR,—Tell your friend, Mr. Harwood, to call upon Mr. Cumberland Kenny, Controller of the Paupers' Property Office. I think he will discover in the official a very old friend. After he has seen him, let him write to me.

“Yours respectfully,

“J. BARMAN.”

CHAPTER III.

THE PAUPERS' PROPERTY OFFICE.

ALL the world knows that the Civil Servants of the Crown are dreadfully overpaid and underworked, and, as a matter of course, what all the world knows *must* be true. In spite of this, however, it is only fair to say that there *are* civil servants who are overworked and underpaid,—men who are bullied and badgered through the livelong day, and who retire to rest but to dream of bankruptcy and starvation. These unhappy creatures belong to offices situated east of Temple Bar,—places connected with the Toast Office

and the Dustoms,—places where the chiefs are “h ”-dropping sons of anybodies and nobodies, and the drudges, the much-enduring offspring of poor clergymen, briefless barristers, and decayed country gentlemen. Believe me, reader, if the West-End Government Offices are Paradises to lazy loungers, the East-End Offices are, in comparison, much worse than Purgatories to industrious clerks. That great writer, Charles Dickens, has given a picture of the Circumlocution Office. Why doesn't he go with his sketch-book into the dreary rooms of that abode of misery and heart-burnings, the Paupers' Property Department? Were Dante alive, he would find in the place plenty of subject for an addition to his ‘Inferno.’

Leopold, a few days after his interview with Marcus Perks, resolved upon paying this dreadful spot a visit. He ordered round his mail-phaeton, and drove to the City. After a journey of some twenty minutes'

duration he arrived at the office. Even its exterior was not particularly prepossessing. It looked like a wool-warehouse that had been neglected in its youth, and, consequently, had taken to dull windows and a vulgar brass plate in its old age. As Leopold drove up to the door, a poor wretch, who had seen some sixty summers, hobbled out. It was one of the junior clerks on his way to his dinner. He hurried away to get his dearly-bought meal before our hero had had time to dismount,—the miserable creature knew that every moment spent out of the office would be remembered against him by the State, to the great diminution of his pitiful salary!

Leopold walked up the stone steps, and found a brusque official guarding this model department, and barring his progress.

“What do you want?” asked the City Cerberus to this Government Hades. “If you want any of the clerks, just give me his

name, and I will see if he's here. We don't allow no one to go upstairs. Our young men 'as to come down into the 'all when so be there's any one to see any of 'em."

"Can I see Mr. Cumberland Kenny?"

"Mr. Cumberland Kenny! Why 'e's our Auditor-in-Chief. Oh, yes, Sir, you can see 'im," said Cerberus, suddenly becoming civil. He continued, in an apologetic tone, "Beg pardon, Sir, but if I was a little short just now, it was all a mistake. I thought as 'ow you 'ad come to see one of our young men,—one of them clerks,—and we are obliged to be very short when we 'as to deal with them. Will you just step in 'ere a minute? Sorry we ain't got no waiting-room. Take in your card, Sir? Yes, Sir."

"'Ere" was a stuffy room, unhealthily crowded with a number of clerks, packed closely together on forms, and hard at work, filling up addresses on envelopes, etc. In front of each "lounger under government"

was a sheet of paper, full of the most undecipherable of wretched writing, from which he had to gather the information necessary for the performance of his task. This sheet of paper was a list of the paupers who had become possessed of legacies, fortunes, peerages, etc., and had been furnished *theoretically* by the very high official, whose duty it was to look after the poor (generally some small provincial tradesman), *actually* by that very high official's wife or children.

"Messenger," said one of the clerks, whose rosy cheeks (so different in colour to those of his luckless companions) proved that he was fresh to the office; "messenger, get me some ink, please."

A loutish young man, with very large and dirty hands, who was walking across the room with a bundle of envelopes, stopped short, and looked the very picture of surprise. On the audacious clerk repeating his request, the loutish young man blurted out

something about "better get it for 'imself, 'e was not going to get ink for nobody, much less for the likes of 'im!" The rosy-cheeked clerk whispered to the man seated next to him, who begged him in a trembling tone to hold his peace.

"What are you jabbering there about, Mr. Melton?" said a "loudly" dressed veteran, approaching the spot speedily. This was the "head of the room." A very great man, and a very proud man; he was great, because he received (being at the top of the official tree) nearly two hundred pounds per annum! He was proud, because his wife's mother's cousin (who had been "something in tallow") had actually been knighted for being a sheriff on the occasion of His Most Gracious Majesty, King George the Third's memorable visit to the City in the year 17—! Was he not great—had he not a right to be proud?

"I was asking for some ink, Sir."

"Asking for some ink, Sir!" echoed the connection of City chivalry, with some signs of irritation. "Well, you mustn't do it, Sir. You must work, Sir. Wot are you stopping for now, Sir?"

"My eyes are weary, and my head aches. May I open one of the windows?"

"Open one of the winders!" almost screamed the excited "head." "No, Sir, you mayn't. Wot d'ye think we put in ground glass into those winders for? Why, to keep yer from looking out into the street!"

At this moment the Cerberus returned, and told Leopold that Mr. Cumberland Kenney would be delighted to see him in his own room. Leaving the stuffy, unhealthy apartment into which he had at first been ushered, our hero made his way into the sanctum of the Auditor-in-Chief. A vulgar-looking man sat at an official desk, and eyed Leopold sharply as he entered.

“Now, Mr. 'Arwood, wot can I do for you ; won't yer take a chair?”

“Thanks.”

“I s'pose you've come about the Jones peerage. A werry sing'lar case. Werry sorry the Pauper can't take 'is seat in the 'ouse of Lords this session. If you've come to pay for the stamp, it will be seven-and-sixpence.”

“No, that is not my business.”

“Well, then, p'raps you wants to know whether Mrs. Sally Brown 'as received the fortune left to her six years ago. No, she ain't, 'cos she died last week in the Union.”

“No, that is not my business.”

“It ain't private, is it?” asked the Auditor with an uneasy glance at his visitor.

“I simply wish to learn what you know of the Raymond murder, committed five years ago at Stelstead, Essex.”

The official dropped in his chair as if he had been shot.

"I know nothing at all about it," he murmured.

"Oh, yes you do, Mr. John Dixon," cried Leopold.

"My name isn't John Dixon, and I won't be insulted—leave the room."

"Look here, my friend," said Leopold calmly but sternly, "I knew you, from the moment I entered this room, to be the *ci-devant* footman of Sir Ralph Ruthven. Men of your stamp don't get appointments in Government offices for nothing. I will give you a week to answer my question. My address is on my card. I don't wish you ill, so I very strongly advise you to obey me. For your own sake don't make me your enemy."

With this our hero walked out of the office. As he got into his trap a vulgarly-dressed Jew asked for Mr. Cumberland Kenny. He told Cerberus to take up the name of Mr. Moses Melchisideck, of the Adelphi.

“Do you know anything of that gentleman?” said Leopold to his servant as he drove away.

“Yes, Sir. He’s one of the sixty-percenters. See’d him often.”

“A money-lender,” mused Leopold; “so so, Master Dixon, my journey has not been quite barren of results !”

CHAPTER IV.

“NOW THAT HE IS DEAD!”

THE sun was sinking fast in the heavens. The trees, with their burden of summer leaves, were throwing long shadows on the yellow, parched-up grass. The lazy streamlet flowed with tiny ripples under the rustic bridge. Now and again the tinkle of a sheep-bell or the flutter of the wings of a bird broke the silence for a moment,—the moment passed, and all once more was still. On the bridge, gazing into the water as it flowed beneath her, stood an English girl—an English girl, with all the loveliness

belonging to her race. It was Florence Ruthven, now in the very prime of early womanhood, beautiful in form and face,—with the golden hair and heavenly blue eyes of the ice-bound North, with the lithesome limbs and passionate blood of the sunny South. Had she lived in days long gone by, when men believed in gods of brain and lust, she would have been pictured as a siren, with sweet-toned harp, and heart-entrancing, death-luring voice; but as her days were the days of the nineteenth century, when men painted her, they painted her stroking a bird or reading a book, with loving smiles, and eyes lifted with sweet devotion to heaven; and when they painted her, they charged a goodly sum for the trouble!

There she stood, gazing thoughtfully into the rippling water—water that could look so calm, and yet, when driven before the wind, could gather passion, and break in angry spray upon the rocks before it,—water that

was beautiful in its calm, and not less beautiful in its anger.

She held in her hand a flower, and as she plucked the petals from the stem, murmured, “I love him, I love him not,—I love him, I love him not,” until the last leaf fell to the oft-repeated words, “I love him not.”

“Do I love him?” she said, as she threw the stalk of the flower into the water. “I don’t know. I thought I loved Leopold. Poor Leopold!”

And she was silent again, and watched what remained of her luckless flower, as the rivulet carried it slowly away from her. She musingly left the bridge, and when she had walked a few paces, stopped and looked around her with an expression of pain stamped upon her mobile features.

“The very spot!” she murmured. “Poor, poor Leopold!”

And she sank on to a bank and buried her face in her hands. By-and-by she be-

came more composed, and then she sought a locket concealed in her bosom. She drew the locket out, opened it, and gazed earnestly at the face that lay hidden in its recess.

“Poor Leopold!” she murmured with a sigh; “poor Leopold!”

She rose from the bank, and walked once more towards the rivulet; she stretched forth her hand. She made a gesture, as if she would cast the locket into the water, and then paused.

“Why should I not keep it?” she cried passionately. “I loved him once,—Heaven knows I loved him once! Who made me give him up? Who sent him away from me?”

She turned sharply round, as a shadow fell on the grass close beside her, and her eyes met those of her sister Edith.

“Florence!”

“Ah, you heard me!” cried the girl passionately. “I am glad of it. You know

you turned my heart against him ; you know you drove him from me !”

“Oh, Florence ! Florence ! Florence, my sister ! Florence, my love !”

“I will have none of your kisses,” continued the excited girl, almost fiercely. “Leave me, do not put your arms near me. Go away. I hate you !”

And she cast her sister from her, and fell to the ground in a burst of passionate weeping. Edith regarded Florence with a face full of sorrow, sighed, and walked away.

At this moment the younger girl looked up through her tears, and, finding her sister gone, sprang to her feet and followed her. Edith stopped and turned round, when she saw what had happened. Florence came up with a faltering step, paused for a moment, and then, throwing her arms round her sister’s neck, pressed her to her bosom, and kissed her.

“Oh, Edith, forgive me ; I did not know

what I was saying. I think I must be going mad."

Her sister returned the embrace, and comforted her as a mother would have soothed a sobbing child.

"Oh, my darling, I know what you have suffered. But it was for your good, my darling; it was for my darling's good!"

Edith repeated the words to herself, and then they walked on in silence, hand to heart, and cheek to cheek.

"Edith, until he had left I never knew how much I cared for him."

And then again they walked on in silence.

"Edith, I may care for him a little now and then, mayn't I, now that he is dead?"

She looked into her sister's face, and a qualm of pain passed over Edith's face as she echoed the words,—

"Now that he is dead!"

* * * * *

Later in the day, the drawing-room of Stelstead Hall was lighted up, and occupied by three of the characters in this most truthful history. Edith stood at a table pouring out three cups of tea; her sister sat at the piano, playing softly; their uncle reclined on a sofa. He was clothed in deep mourning, and looked tired and care-worn. Every now and then his eyes wandered to the portrait of his dead wife, hanging over the old-fashioned mantelpiece, and then he would relapse into a fit of moody meditation. His niece brought him a cup of tea, and, as he raised his eyes to hers to thank her, he seemed to become conscious for the first time that Florence was in the room. He called to her—

“Florence, my dear, what are you playing?”

“Oh, uncle, I am only passing my fingers across the keys.”

And she played a fragment of one of Strauss’s plaintive waltzes.

“My dear, I am very sad to-night. Play something that will enliven me.”

Florence stopped, and then began one of Verdi's most brilliant wine songs. She finished a few bars, and then her fingers rested on the pianoforte listlessly, and her eyes gazed into space.

“Well, my darling,” cried Sir Ralph ; “go on.”

Suddenly recalled to herself by the sound of her uncle's voice, Florence once more attempted to play. Her hands swept the notes of the instrument for a moment, and then she stopped short, her head drooped, and she began crying.

“I can't play to-night, uncle dear. I do feel so wretched.”

“What's the matter, my love?” asked her uncle anxiously.

“Nothing, dear ; only I have a headache.” She got up, left the instrument, and throwing herself into a chair, began to talk softly

to her sister Edith. Undisturbed by the sound of music or voices, Sir Ralph once more relapsed into his moody melancholy.

By-and-by, there was a knock at the door, and the butler entered the room.

“What do you want, Storks; I did not ring?” said Edith.

“Oh, if you please, Miss,” replied the old man, “I am sorry to say that there has been an accident.”

“An accident!”

“Well, leastways, that’s to say, Miss, there’s been a gross piece of carelessness. A letter came for you to-day, Miss, and they forgot downstairs to give it to you, Miss, and here it is.”

“A letter for me!”

“Yes, Miss,” said the old man, looking through his spectacles. “Yes, it’s addressed to ‘Miss Ruthven.’”

He reached the letter towards her, Florence took it out of his hands and passed

it to her sister. As she gave it to Edith, she glanced at the writing on the envelope. She started, and watched her sister as she broke the seal.

Edith noticed her sister's emotion, and looked at the letter for a moment or so before she opened it. Setting her teeth, she read the letter through, and although her hand trembled, and her heart beat painfully, her face remained as rigid as marble.

"Who is it from?" cried Florence, after the butler had left the room.

"From a Mr. Richard Harwood," replied Edith, and although the sentence was clearly articulated, it was evident that each word cost a struggle. "I met him on board the 'Queen of the West.'"

"May I read it, dear?"

"Yes, if you like;" and Edith passed the letter over to her sister.

Florence read as follows:—

“*Royal Chambers,*

“— *St. James's Street,*

“*4th July, 18—.*”

“DEAR MISS RUTHVEN,

“You were good enough to say that you would be happy to see me at any time I might please to run down to Stelstead. I have leisure next week, and must pay you a visit on Tuesday with Mr. Holston. Will you be kind enough to send me an invitation?

“Yours very faithfully,

“RICHARD HARWOOD.”

“*Must* pay you a visit!” commented Florence; “why, his petition sounds amazingly like a command.”

“I am under an obligation to him,” said Edith, in a low tone.

“An obligation!”

“Yes; you know the story of my escape from the ‘Punjaub,’—Mr. Richard Harwood was the man who saved my life.”

And Edith relapsed into silence. Here was a calamity, the very future she had so much dreaded in the past! Leopold to visit Stelstead,—after the scene with Florence! Why, it would be madness. And yet she dared not break her oath, she had sworn to be his slave,—could she repudiate her chains? And then, another reason; but this reason, although the most powerful of all, was unconfessed even to herself,—she wanted to see him, she longed to see him, she died to see him. She must risk it, she would risk it! And yet no, she did not dare!

Even while these thoughts were passing through her mind, Florence had cast off her fit of sadness, and was asking a thousand questions about the coming man. “Was he young, and rich, and handsome? Had he good teeth, fine eyes? Was he dark or light? Was he wise, or witty, or melancholy?” These, and a score of other

queries, Florence put to her, not waiting a moment to hear her sister's replies.

After a moment Edith said, “I think the letter so rude that I shall certainly not answer it.”

“What! do you mean to say that you won't ask him here?”

“I think not, my dear.”

“What, after he has saved your life!”

“No.”

“Oh, Edith, how unkind of you, when you know how fond I am of people staying down here! You know how slow it is.”

“But won't Mr. Holston be down here next week?” asked her sister with a smile.

“Yes, of course he will,” cried Florence impatiently; “but he's such an old friend that I don't count him at all.”

“Not at all?” said Edith.

“Well, you know what I mean,” replied her sister blushing. “Now *do* ask this

young man down. I really think you should. Now do, like a dear."

"Florence, I have said no; I mean it. Mr. Harwood is the last man in the world you ought to know."

"Why?"

"Why?" echoed Edith hesitatingly. "Don't ask me why, darling. Believe me, I speak for your good. I do, I do indeed."

She spoke with all the earnestness of her soul. Florence was silent for a moment, and then seemed to have forgotten all about it. It was the peculiarity of this young lady never to be in the same mood two hours together. Now as she had been wretched in the earlier part of the evening, as a natural consequence, her spirits rose as the night grew apace. Before the bedroom candles were brought into the room, she had regained all her wonted liveliness.

She kissed her uncle and sister affectionately, and tripped up to her room laugh-

ingly. She threw open the window, and looked out upon the park that was now bathed in the moonlight.

She kissed her hand in the direction of London, and cried,—

“Love me, Freddy; love me.”

As she uttered these words, a locket fell to the ground. She picked it up and opened it. She kissed the face she found within, and murmured sadly, as she closed the window, “Now that *he* is dead!”

CHAPTER V.

FACE TO FACE !

AGAIN the setting sun behind the trees, the long, long shadows on the grass and the dusty road, and the stunted hedgerows. Birds chirping in the cool loveliness of the summer's eve, bubbling water trinkling from the tiny streamlets, and the pale moon waiting for the golden glories of the sky to die, to bathe all nature in her silvery light. Oh, lovely land of beauty ! oh, England, sweetest daughter of Europe ! oh, country of stock-jobbers and humbugs, maniacs, ruffians, and fools, where philanthropists make large for-

tunes out of the alms of the poor, and novelists write rubbish for the magazines at so many copper pence for the yard !

A truce to sentiment. Good wine needs no bush, and an English landscape on a beautiful summer's evening no trumpeter to point out its thousand beauties. Britons can picture the scene for themselves,—it would be cruel to describe the spot for foreigners. Envy is torture ; need I say more ?

On this lovely summer's evening a dog-cart travelled along the road at a good pace. It was drawn by a spirited horse, who made little of hills, and less of valleys. Passing by villages that might some day become towns, and cottages that might some day gather to themselves companions and become villages, the trap rattled along on its journey. The driver was a young man who had evidently been taught that to spare the whip was to spoil the horse, and had paid the greatest possible attention to the lesson he

had learnt in the course of his education. By-and-by the dog-cart came to a full stop; the driver had reached a cross road, which certainly boasted a sign-post—a sign-post whose inscription, however, was illegible in the twilight. After several vain attempts to read the distances as they appeared set down on the wood above him, the driver whistled, and with a few impatient words to his companion, awaited the arrival of some rustic who could give him the information kept back from him by the growing darkness.

The expected aid was not long in appearing. Soon the faint sound of heavy hobnailed boots crushing down the stones of the country road was heard in the distance. The faint sound grew louder and more distinct, and at length an old man clothed in a smock frock, and wearing fustian breeches and blue stockings, stood before the dog-cart, and close to the sign-post.

“Here, my man,” cried the driver ;
“stop a moment, I want to ask you a question.”

“Eh, Sir ?” said the old fellow, putting his hand to his ear and drawing forward his neck.

“Can you tell me the way to Stelstead Hall ?”

“Well, Sir, it should not be far from here ; but see, here comes Master Samson just behind me, if he comes up *he* will tell you all about it.”

The uncommunicative peasant walked on, leaving the dog-cart to its fate. He had scarcely turned the corner ere Jas Samson, the village cobbler, with his coat and waistcoat unbuttoned, made his appearance. The veteran was smoking a pipe, and had evidently walked to this spot to enjoy the cool air of the evening after the hard work of the hot summer’s day. When he was abreast of the dog-cart the driver called out to him.

“I say, my man, can you tell me the way to Stelstead Hall?”

“I know that voice,” murmured Jas to himself. “Well, Sir, you must go straight on for the better part of a mile, and then turn sharp up to the left by the lane over yonder; halfway down you will find the Lodge, and there you are.”

“Thanks very much,” cried the driver, turning his horse. As the dog-cart passed, Samson, whose eyes had been fixed upon it, gave a most wonderful start, and dropped his pipe. The horse took the road at a gallop, and the old cobbler was soon left far behind.

The trap rolled on at a rapid rate by the hedges, up the lane, past the Lodge gates, into the very avenue of trees leading up to the Manor House. There let us leave it, and return for a season to Jas Samson.

The old fellow was sitting beneath the sign-post, wiping his forehead with a large

coloured pocket-handkerchief. His eyes were fixed on vacancy, and his mouth was wide open. The broken pipe lay beside him, near the neglected but still smouldering tobacco, which, now released from its clay chamber, made the most of its liberty and vapouring.

The veteran sat for ten minutes without changing his position, then he looked up and muttered these six mysterious words, "Could it 'ave been his ghost?" This said, and he was silent ; his eyes stared once more into space.

* * * * *

There was some excitement in Stelstead Hall. Mr. Frederick Holston, the London dandy, was expected down, and great were the preparations that had been made in his honour. First the cook had exerted herself to manufacture marvellous dishes out of mushrooms and sauces and zests. *Entrées* that were two-thirds dressing to one-third

meat waited in the kitchen, ready at a moment's notice to leave the abode of savoury vapours for the more refined atmosphere of the dining-room, with its table costlily with plate, and beautiful and fragrant with flowers. Sally, the under-housemaid, and Hannah, Miss Florence's own maid, had done wonders in the bedroom given over to the guest. White curtains, and vases full of roses, easy chairs, and snowy towels waited in readiness to welcome the coming Londoner. Last and most important of all, Florence—fair, bewitching Florence—had adorned herself before the toilet-glass, and had smiled at her reflection in the mirror as it looked back at her with its mass of golden hair, costly lace, and blue drapery.

Singing merrily as she bustled about, the lovely girl hurried from one room to another, arranging this and altering that. In spite of her joyous song and apparently happy demeanour, a close observer would have

detected something false in her laugh,— something garish and unreal in her gaiety. Every now and then the smiles were chased from her lips, and her face became very grave as the thought rose in her mind,—

“ Do I love him ? ”

But the thought passed away in a second, and then she was free once more to sing and laugh and be merry.

In the hall she found her sister Edith, who regarded her with eyes full of love and admiration.

“ Oh, Florence dear,” she said, kissing her, “ you are very lovely.”

“ It runs in the family, Edy,” cried the girl, returning her sister’s embrace ; and then she dashed to the door, as the sound of wheels was heard on the gravel walk without.

At that moment the crushing of the gravel stopped, and the voice of a man was heard speaking to another. At the sound Edith

started, turned quite pale, and gasped for breath.

“Florence !” she cried in a harsh unnatural tone, “Come away, for Heaven’s sake come away !”

“What, with Mr. Holston at the door !” answered Florence, trying to turn the lock, which moved but slowly.

“Come ; for Heaven’s sake come !” cried Edith once more in an agony of entreaty.

Florence was too busy to notice her sister’s marble-pale face and trembling figure. She fumbled at the door, which at length rewarded her efforts by turning on its hinges.

Freddy rushed into the house, and seized the tiny hand which Florence had given him with a smile of pleasure and a little air of coquetry. He was about to utter some gallant speech, when his prize was suddenly withdrawn, and as he raised his eyes he saw a terrified girl, as pale as death, holding her sister’s arm with one hand, and pointing

with the other to his fellow-traveller, who now stood in the doorway, with the light of the hall-lamp falling full upon his features.

“Who is that?” said the trembling girl in an icy, unnatural whisper.

Florence Ruthven and Leopold Lawson—the deceiver and the deceived—were face to face!

CHAPTER VI.

RETURNED FROM THE DEAD!

THERE they stood, the two women and the two men, for a moment like a group of marble, and then Edith murmured in a low tone to her sister, "Florence, Florence, compose yourself. See, Mr. Holston is looking at us. Remember we have guests beneath our roof." The frightened girl loosened her grasp of her sister's arm, and fell back in silence. Freddy, surprised beyond measure, looked for enlightenment to Leopold, who now advanced, and addressed Miss Ruthven.

"I fear," he said, with a slight stress

upon his words, "that my letter accepting your invitation must have miscarried. I am afraid you did not expect me."

"To be frank, we did not," replied Edith, who had now recovered from her emotion. She continued, in the cold, polite tone of society, "But we are delighted to see you; a room shall be prepared for you at once. Let me introduce you to my sister Florence. Florence, my dear—Mr. Richard Harwood."

Florence bowed, and Leopold moved towards her. "I am afraid I must have startled you by my sudden appearance, Miss Ruthven. I admit that with a little slow music, and a plentiful supply of the lime light, you might have easily taken me for a ghost."

"You may well say that, Harwood," said Freddy. "I don't believe in resurrections, if I did I should say that you looked exactly like a man returned from the dead!"

"Returned from the dead! my dear Hol-

ston," replied Leopold smiling. "No; in these days, when a man gets to his grave, I should think he must be very satisfied to rest and be thankful. If ghosts did walk the earth, they would be sure to be influenced by the commercial spirit of the age. Hamlet's father, had he lived in the nineteenth century, would have gone to the Polytechnic for employment, instead of bothering his unhappy son about that little matter of the traitor Claudius."

"Then do you think that vengeance is out of date, Mr. Harwood?" said Edith.

"Certainly; people are too languid for anything of the kind. To be sure Justice is, and ever will be, immortal."

"Is not justice another name for vengeance?"

"I think not."

"I am sure you both must be tired after your journey," said Florence, who had by this time recovered her equanimity. Her

fright was now succeeded by a vivacity which brought smiles to her lips and a flush to her cheek. "Come, Mr. Holston, I will attend to you first. I'll show you your room, you can't imagine how pretty it is. This way, Sir."

And with a little laugh of coquetry, the beautiful girl led the way. Leopold followed her with his eyes. Edith, who had ordered the servants to take up Lawson's portmanteau to the room that had been allotted to him, now approached the unexpected guest.

"Why have you come here?" she asked in a low, angry tone, when they found themselves alone.

"Edith, have you any right to question me?"

"Oh, Leopold," she murmured, in a voice which now trembled with sorrow, "have you no compassion? are you so pitiless, that you can see the pain you give me, and can

answer me with a coldness that you know is as cruel as it is cowardly? Have you *no* generosity? In your heart you *cannot* blame me for striving to thwart your scheme of vengeance."

"I have no scheme of vengeance."

"Call it justice or what you will, it—"

"Edith," said Leopold, interrupting her, "I do not wish to be hard with you. *You* shall not blame me for dealing a foul blow. I do not come here now as your enemy, or the enemy of this family. Instead of regarding me with dread, you should rather welcome me as a friend—as a deliverer."

"What do you mean?"

"The future is buried in the past, so I can speak frankly. Florence," his lip trembled as he mentioned her name, "is dead (as you know) to me, but I cannot see her sacrificed to a scoundrel. It is for your sister's sake that I am here."

"I do not understand you."

“You say that with Frederick Holston in the house!”

“Ah! now I have learnt your meaning,” she cried in an impatient voice. “You would come to her feet again like a beaten dog, and kiss the hand that has chastened you! You with your prison-tainted name; you—”

“Stay,” said Leopold. “You must be mad to speak like this. Do you think I would bend so low as to pray at a shrine which I know holds but a false and cruel idol? Do you think that *I* am mad?”

“I know that you love her.”

“What if I do? In my very love do you not see the bar that divides us? How could I bear another heart-stab? how could I live after a second betrayal? You do not know me, girl.”

“Will you promise me then not to renew the past? will you—”

“Enough; your words insult me. You

know the reason of my visit. It is for you to decide whether we are to be friends or foes."

"Friends," she cried, stretching out her hand. He took it, and pressed it coldly. Then a servant came into the hall, and ushered him away to his room. He bowed as he left Edith.

"*Au revoir*, Miss Ruthven. We shall meet at dinner."

"*Au revoir*," she replied. For a moment she stood looking at the door by which he had retired, rapt in deep thought. Then she murmured, "Still he loves her!" and then the murmur changed into a weary sigh—a sigh, oh, *so* weary!

In the meanwhile Florence had led Freddy towards *his* room. As they ascended the staircase, Mr. Freddy observed in a dissatisfied tone,

"Well, Florence, you seem to be very much struck with the unexpected visitor."

“Don’t call me Florence, Mr. Holston.”

“Oh, nonsense!” said Freddy, (this young man sometimes forgot to be polite when he happened to be angry,) “I’m in no mood for humbug! I say you seem to be very much struck with him.”

The girl looked surprised. She thought, “Is this the amiable chatty Freddy I have learned to like,—this rough, rude man?” Freddy with quick tact saw at once the mistake he had made. He tried to efface the impression he had produced.

“Of course,” he said with a little laugh, “when I say ‘nonsense’ I am very rude, and don’t deserve to be forgiven; and when I talk about humbug, my manners become simply abominable.”

“I think so,” replied Florence, with greater gravity than was her wont.

“But,” continued Freddy, not in the least abashed by the cold tone in which his advances were met, “I know your forgiving

nature, and that you will make allowance for the feelings of a half-maddened lover and a wholly-famished traveller."

Florence smiled in spite of herself. "You deserve to be punished," she said.

"I know I do," he cried, "and I *will* be punished. Set me a task, and I will perform it. Yes, even if you tell me to listen all the evening to Harwood's senseless cackle I will do it, only you *must* let me go to sleep after the first five minutes. You really must bow to nature, and let me go to sleep."

"Not a bad idea, only we will alter it a little. *I* will talk to Mr. Harwood; you, if you like, may go to sleep;" and she tripped away.

"No, my lady," he murmured to himself with an ugly smile when she had gone, "if you *do* talk with that fellow, I think I shall be able to keep my eyes open!"

By-and-by the family and the visitors met in the drawing-room. Florence was the first

to appear; she sat down at the piano and played a lively air, an air which exactly corresponded with her feelings,—an air of joy and mirth and triumph. Soon she was joined by Edith. The moment she noticed her sister's presence, she jumped up and rushed to her, crying.

“Oh, Edith, do you know who Mr. Harwood is?”

Her sister looked at her earnestly, and was about to make some answer, when the door opened, and Freddy, well pomaded and scented, lounged into the room.

“Interrupting no confidences, I hope,” he said, when he found that his entrance had caused a silence.

“Not in the least, Mr. Holston,” replied Edith, who, to tell the truth, was much relieved by his appearance. As for Florence, she turned away from him.

“Not forgiven yet?” he said, following her.

“No” was the answer he received.

He made a comically piteous face, which had its desired effect—it brought a smile to the face of the younger girl.

“You know Mr. Harwood, Miss Ruthven?” observed Freddy, with a sharp, stealthy look at Edith.

“Yes,” she replied, carelessly turning over the leaves of a photograph book.

“He’s a most charming fellow,” continued Freddy; “most charming, take him all in all.”

“*I think so,*” put in Florence.

“Of course; who would not who had seen him for at least twenty seconds? A little conceited, perhaps,—just the smallest bit, eh, Miss Ruthven?” Another sharp look at Edith.

“I do not think so,” she answered, turning over the leaves a little more quickly.

“Well, perhaps you are right. After all, it’s no very grave fault; I have been called conceited myself.”

“Is it possible?” This from Florence.

“You wouldn’t think it, but it is quite possible;” and Freddy continued: “but what I don’t like about Harwood is his extreme caution.”

“It appears to me,” said Edith, who had become more and more irritated while he was speaking, “that he shows no caution at all—in the selection of his friends.”

“You are too severe, Miss Ruthven,” returned Freddy, with a smile; “you are, indeed. Surely a man may find out faults in the fellows he knows. Remember, only ladies are perfect. No, what I object to is Harwood’s caution—or, if you like it better, his want of generosity.”

“You have no right to speak thus of Mr. Harwood,” cried Edith, at length fairly roused. “You are no true friend of his; you—”

And then she stopped short, for she saw Florence gazing at her with eyes full of surprise.

“At any rate,” said Freddy curtly, and with a slight bow, “Harwood can congratulate himself upon having at least *one* true friend.”

“Mr. Harwood saved my life,” murmured Edith, as much in explanation to Florence as in reply to Holston.

Leopold now entered the room, and the conversation became general. By-and-by Sir Ralph joined the group. He looked round, and said,

“Mr. Harwood—is Mr. Harwood here?”

“Yes, dear,” replied Edith, leading Leopold towards him. She said in a low tone to the young man, “My uncle’s eyes begin to fail him.”

“I am glad to see you, Sir,—very glad to see you, Sir.”

He looked at Leopold with weak eyes, and spoke in a trembling voice; he was the wreck of what he had been, the very shadow of his former self.

“You are very kind, Sir Ralph,” replied Leopold.

“Eh!” exclaimed the baronet, looking about him with a bewildered air.

“I say you are very kind, Sir Ralph,” the young man repeated.

“I have heard that voice before,” the baronet murmured; “somewhere, somewhere in the past. But there, my memory’s gone, quite gone. Everything’s gone!”

But he looked at Leopold with a sort of feeble pleasure, as if some happy memory (he knew not what) were connected with his face.

Fate has a second name,—among the rich it is called “Dinner;” among the poor it sometimes insists upon being known as “Starvation.” That sleek Messenger of Fate, Storks, the butler, soon appeared with the glad tidings “that dinner was served,” upon which there was a general movement among the company.

Sir Ralph called to Edith to help him downstairs. Rather reluctantly she complied, saying as she approached the baronet,

“You, Mr. Holston, will take my sister Florence.”

Freddy rushed with avidity to the side of the fair girl.

“No,” said Florence, “you are in disgrace, Sir. You shall go down by yourself.”

“You will at least let me act as a guard of honour,” replied Freddy with a hard smile, which only *just* concealed his anger.

“No, Sir, I shall permit nothing of the sort. You must leave the room, and get well down the staircase before I move a step. Now march, Sir.”

Freddy smiled a smile which looked more like a grimace than what it was intended to represent at Leopold, and left the room with a little toss of his head.

“Ah, my lady,” he thought to himself as

he went down the staircase, "you shall pay for this—you shall pay dearly, very dearly for this. Take my word for it, my lady, I never break a promise!"

In the meanwhile Leopold had offered his arm to Florence. She looked timidly up at him, and then murmured,

"Leopold!"

He was silent—silent as the grave.

In a more piteous voice she repeated, with her hands twined across his arm, and her now tearful eyes raised towards his own.

"Leopold! dear Leopold!"

Once more he was silent. Edith was returning to the drawing-room; they heard her coming up the stairs. Florence said even more earnestly than before,

"Oh, Leopold! dear Leopold! I have not forgotten you!"

But he answered her not a word.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH STORM AND RAIN.

THE night passed and the morning broke. The fields that in the moonlight had resembled lakes of silver bound by purple-coloured mountains, resumed their normal colours in the coming light of day; the lakes lost themselves gradually in clods of earth, the purple mountains turned once more into stunted hedgerows. The songs of the birds rose to the streaky sky, the cottage doors opened to let out sleepy labourers, the cottage chimneys asserted themselves and filled the morning air with puffs of wood-

born smoke. The night was dead; the day lived once again. Repose was gone, carrying away dreams and visions, and now the scorching sun claimed once more the daily toil of millions,—claimed the labour without which the sun might scorch and the clouds might rain, and yet the land remain but barren,—claimed the labour, the lot of man, the sad inheritance handed down to us by father Adam.

Under one of the hedges, in a dry ditch, lay a bundle of rags and tatters. In the light of the early morning this bundle was scarcely discernible, but soon as the sun rose higher in the heavens, and the day grew older, men could see that the bundle was a living woman.

As the labourers passed by on their road to their work, they glanced at the wretched creature who had found her bed in the ditch, and hurried away. What cared they whether this woman had fallen among

thieves? *They* were not good Samaritans, and did not wish to be. If *they* spent two-pence, it was not in charity, and never would be,—that is to say, so long as beer could be bought by copper pieces! So they left the woman to lie among the nettles and the long rank grass, and hastened away to their toil—toil to be followed at nightfall by debauchery as brutal as the labour of the day.

By-and-by a shrill whistle was heard, and then two dogs bounded along the road, and gambolled by the side of a fresh-coloured young farmer, who was making towards a distant field. The dogs left him after a while, and rushed along the road. They stopped soon, and dashed into the ditch. In another moment one of them was tugging at the rags.

“Come off, Ponto! come here, Lion!” cried the young farmer with a crack of his whip, when he arrived on the field of action.

“What are you doing, Sirs ! Come off this instant !”

The dogs obeyed reluctantly, and stood growling at the mouth of the ditch. As they stood thus, the figure beneath them rose to her full height. Oh ! it was a horrid sight. Picture to yourself, fair reader, or stern critic, (*you*, the last-named, fill the second place in my regard,) an old woman, with black, wolfish, hungry eyes, and dishevelled grey hair ; with a face telling of much sin and more misery ; with a crooked form and skinny hands, more like claws than human palms and fingers, with a shambling gait, and a wheezing body ; lastly, but not least, with an expression on her storm-beaten countenance suggesting both savage fear and stealthy menace. This creature have a soul, a chance of salvation ! Credit it, and you must believe that serpents learn the Church Catechism and tigers read the Bible !

"Come, mother, you look weary," said the young farmer, as the rags and tatters rose from the ditch, and showed the face of the living woman. "I hope my dogs didn't hurt you."

She scowled at him, as she straightened her dirty battered bonnet, and drew closer round her the rags and tatters of her faded shawl. She scowled at him, I repeat, but held her peace.

"Can't I do anything for you?" the young farmer continued. "Where are you going?"

"If you *will* speak," she answered, in a wild angry voice, "show me the way to Stelstead."

"You must take that road," he said, pointing to some rising ground with his whip; "but I warn you it's a good four miles from here."

"Oh, I'll do it, if I die for it," she replied savagely; and as she got from the

ditch to the road, repeated more than once, "if I die for it; yes, if I die for it!"

The young farmer generously held out his arm to assist her to rise, but she brushed it away with an impatient gesture, and regained her feet without his assistance. Still the dogs growled at her, in spite of the presence of their master's threatening frown and leather whip,—growled, and would not be appeased.

The woman, scowling at them the while, staggered off—only for a dozen paces though, for then she fell. The dogs were on her in a moment,—but for a moment, and no longer, for their master's whip soon drove them yelping away.

"You are ill, mother," said the young farmer, bending over her. "Why, your hands burn like fire! you are ill, very ill."

"I am well, quite well," she cried, making an effort to rise.

"Here, take this,—it will do you good,"

said the young farmer, putting a brandy flask to her lips.

She stared at him, and then drank a deep draught of the potent spirit. She rose, and her face softened a little, as she looked at the youth before her.

“Thank you,” she murmured; “you have been good to me.”

And then she scowled once more, and the old wolfish look returned to her face, as she listened to the low sharp growls of the dogs. She shook her fist at them, turned round, and took the road to Stelstead.

* * * * *

The day had grown two hours older. Jas Samson was up and about. He had fed his ducks, and looked at his bees, and seen after his chickens. Minus his coat, and plus his leather apron, he had been very busy indeed. His grape vine had wanted some nailing last night, but it didn't want nailing to-day; his rabbit hutch was dilapidated at

midnight, but it was now in a splendid state of preservation. In fact, as I have said before, Jas had been very busy and industrious, and had done an immense deal of carpentering. In spite of his labour, however, he was very thoughtful. Every now and then he stopped at his work, scratched his head, and seemed to be busily employed in solving a most difficult problem.

“Could it have been he?” he said, when these fits were upon him. He stared into vacancy, and then resumed his work.

By-and-by the village postman passed by the Green, and gave Mr. Jas “Good morning.”

“I say, William,” said Samson; “do you believe in ghosts?”

“No, Sir, I don’t; do you?”

“Eh, I can’t say that I do,” replied Jas, scratching his head, and the postman passed on.

A little later Father Dutton, the Roman

Catholic priest, marched by on his way to say mass at the chapel lying beyond the trees in the distance.

“Good morning, Sir,” said Jas, touching his hat.

“Good morning, Mr. Samson,” replied the worthy priest, returning the salute. Jas and the Father were on the best possible terms; they always treated each other with perfect courtesy. It is true that either thought the other bound for the Infernal Regions, but this belief did not in the slightest degree interfere with their friendship.

“If it ain’t asking you an impertinent question, do you believe in ghosts, Sir?” said Jas, with an anxious face.

“Well, Mr. Samson,” replied the ecclesiastic, stopping short, and considering the matter cautiously—he was always cautious when he had to deal with a heretic and democrat like Jas,—“Well, no, Mr. Samson; I don’t think I do. If it isn’t asking you an impertinent question, do you?”

“Well, no, Sir; I can’t say that *I* do.” And again Jas began scratching his head, and staring into vacancy.

The priest waited for a moment, and then, with a “Good morning, Mr. Samson,” resumed his walk with a stride that had been learned in camp rather than church.

By-and-by a lumbering plough-boy, driving some cows, came before Jas’s door. The cobbler, in returning the ploughboy’s salute, asked him the question which he twice had put before that morning.

“Do you believe in ghosts?” was Samson’s query.

“Well, Muster, e’es I do.”

“Then what a precious fool you must be!” cried the cobbler angrily. “There’s no such things as ghosts nowadays, and whoever believes them is a born idiot.”

“All right, Muster,” replied the rustic, with a grin, and he resumed his cow-driving.

“There’s no such things as ghosts, I

know," said Jas, very slowly, "and yet I saw *his* ghost as clearly as I see my own face when I peer into the looking-glass. A ghost, indeed!"

"What are you saying about ghosts, Jas?" The question was put to him in a well-remembered voice. He turned round sharply, and cried,

"So it was you, Leopold, after all. Welcome—a thousand times welcome—my dear, dear boy! Come in here, and tell me all your news. I am *so* glad to see you!"

He seized him by the hands, and led him to the cottage door. As they got to the portal, the weird figure of a woman clothed in rags arrived at the shop.

"Which is the way to the churchyard?" asked this horrible apparition, with a wolfish look.

Jas raised his hammer, and pointed towards the church. The woman was about to move on, when she caught sight of Leo-

pold. She stopped, trembled, and stared at him with a stony look, then she moved slowly away.

“Do you know her?” asked Jas, in a low tone.

“No.”

She walked on slowly, stopping every now and then to look back towards Leopold, who seemed to exercise a strange influence over her.

As Lawson and Samson entered the cottage, the old woman was still looking back.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOUND!

“How changed you are!” exclaimed Samson, when his favourite was duly ensconced in an old arm-chair—an arm-chair kept sacred by the master of the house to the use of only the most honoured of Jas’s guests.

“It’s not impossible,” Lawson answered, with a smile. “Remember, I have grown many years older since I last saw you.”

“Ah, my poor boy!” said Jas, with a sigh, “you have grown much too old for your years—much too old. But there, tell

me all your news. You are home at last, and are rich ? and well ? and happy ?”

“ I am rich, Jas, and well, and—” he hesitated, and then continued, “ *who is* happy in this miserable world ? And now I will tell you my adventures.”

For more than an hour the two men conversed, Leopold explaining, and Jas listening with greedy ears to the stories of his favourite’s travels. Time passed on, and yet they found matter, plenty of matter for discussion. Samson seemed to never tire of asking questions about Australia, its laws, land, and people.

“ A strange place, but a good place,” he said ; “ I should have done better if I had gone over there, my boy. Not that I have much to complain of ; I am very happy and contented.”

“ You are not a bit changed, Jas.”

“ No,” replied the old man, passing his fingers through his long, white hair. “ No, I

don't suppose I am. My next change will be a change of bedrooms. When I do make the change, I shall give up my four-poster for the grave. But, thank God, I am strong and hearty, and have many a year of life in my old carcase yet. Where are you staying?"

"At Stelstead Hall."

"At Stelstead Hall!" If a thunderbolt had struck the cottage and broken the crockery, Samson could not have looked more surprised.

"Yes," said Leopold, slightly confused; "I am staying there under an assumed name, Richard Harwood. I was lucky enough to render Miss Ruthven a slight service abroad, and she has been kind enough to ask me down to Stelstead."

"Come, Leopold, I know you too well to accept this as a reason. Ay, in spite of your white hair and firm mouth and steady gaze, I can read your heart as easily as a book. You have come here for a purpose."

“ Well !”

“ And I tell you you are mad. Yes, mad, my poor boy, mad.”

“ I don’t quite understand you, Jas.”

“ Well, I will make my meaning plainer—Miss Florence.”

“ Oh, that dream died long ago. Once deceived, Jas—”

“ Deceived for ever,” put in Samson, finishing the sentence for him. “ I tell you, my poor boy, that you who believe yourself so secure were never in greater danger. The moth thinks himself safe when he flutters about the candle. I am a plain man, Leopold, and an older man than you, my poor boy. Come, take the advice of one who loves you as his son ; leave Stelstead Hall at once.”

“ My dear Jas,” replied Leopold in a calm, decided, and measured tone, “ I cannot if I would.”

Samson looked up at the determined face,

sighed, and shook his head, and changed the conversation. After he had stayed some five minutes longer, Leopold rose to take his leave. Promising to come to see his old friend every morning during his stay at the Park, and begging him to keep his real name a secret, Lawson shook Jas's hand warmly and walked away.

For the rest of the day, Samson was sad and absent. He murmured to himself at his work, and repeated one sentence over and over and over again. The sentence ran as follows :—

“ Poor boy, poor boy ; he must be mad ! ”

* * * * *

Limping forward and gazing backwards, with many a savage sigh and mumbled curse, the mass of tatters and dirt, with her iron-grey hair and weather-beaten features, went her way. Whither ? To the church with its spire always pointing heavenwards, ever protesting with its uplifted cross against the

infidelity of the world. With bloodshot eyes peering about like a cowed and beaten hound, with hands clasping the torn shawl about her, with a step soft as a tiger's and as stealthy, with lips hot and dry, moving convulsively with every gasp, the outcast moved along wearily, oh, so wearily. Stopping for a moment to look into a hedge, resting for a minute to lean against a milestone, then, as the noise of footsteps was carried towards her by the summer breeze, limping away with eyes full of dread and suspicion. This a woman ! This poor brute, this wild beast a woman ! Heaven save us ! Eve's apple was dearly bought.

Sunning himself before his portal, and alternately sniffing up the perfume of the flowers and inhaling the smoke of tobacco, stood Simon Butler, the village clerk. A great man was he among the parishioners of Stelstead—a learned man (did he not read the responses to the psalms ?), and a won-

derful musician (was it not he who played such delightful hymns in church—on the barrel-organ?). There he stood, with his apprentices at work behind him cutting and contriving coats, and finishing in the latest style (after the highly-coloured plate of fashions for the year 1839, preserved in the window of the shop), trousers for all the country bumpkins for ten miles round. Simon Butler was not only a Pillar of the Church, but a tailor; he helped the parson to look after the souls of the Stelsteadians, and had complete control over the clothing of their bodies. He was rather “high and mighty,” but had a good heart, as many of those who listened with open-mouthed wonder to his marvellous feats on the barrel-organ could have testified if called upon so to do. He had seen the lump of rags and tatters plodding her weary way up the High Street, and had not been surprised, for tramps were as common as blackberries in

his part of the country. He had observed her casting thirsty glances at the village inn, and had taken them as matter of course,—as all tramps were wont to get drunk when they had the chance—at least at Stelstead. But he was *not* prepared to be looked at by the tramp as if he had been a curious object under a glass case at Madame Tussaud's, and she a liberal-minded sight-seer who had paid sixpence extra to inspect the Chamber of Horrors.

“What are you staring at?” asked Simon, after an ineffectual attempt to “stare her down.” “What do you want?”

The woman, instead of answering him, pointed at his cravat.

“Yes,” he said. “It's a white one; there's nothing the matter with it, is there?”

“You are the clerk to that church,” she said, pointing with her hand to the spire hard by.

“ Well, what if I am ?”

“ There’s some one lying buried there that was dear to me, oh, so dear !” she cried. “ Oh, so dear to me before they took her away !”

She put her hand to her head, and brushed away the iron-grey hair hurriedly, as if the locks were so many snakes that bit and stung her.

“ Come, come, my good woman, you must move off,” said Simon. “ Now come, get into the next parish ; we know nothing of you here, you know.”

“ Move away !” she cried excitedly. “ I’ve been always moving away. I’ve nearly died from moving away ; there’s no room for *me* on God’s earth ! I’ve walked through the storm and rain starving, and through the scorching sunshine starving, and in the bitter cold night starving ! But I am here at last—here at last, and I will kiss my darling’s grave before I die !”

“Come, come, *this* won’t do, you know, my good woman,” said Simon. “Now take my advice, like a good soul ; move into the next parish, it ain’t far off.”

The “good soul” in her rags and tatters had paid but little attention to the clerical musician’s words. She had stood with her hungry, bloodshot eyes fixed upon the spire of the little village church. She turned round sharply, and said,

“You can tell me where she lies.”

“Where *who* lies ?” asked the Clerk in evident distress. He wanted to preserve his dignity, and yet was touched by the woman’s wild, mad grief.

“I traced her here,” she answered wearily. “Ah, poor girl ! Heaven grant that she was spared my sufferings !”

“Well, if you can give me her name, I dare say I may remember where they put her. Was it long ago ?”

“Yes ; long, long ago.”

“ Well, man and boy, I’ve been about the ‘churchyard these thirty years. I dare say I knowed her.”

“ Her name was Emma Barlow.”

“ Barlow ! Why that was the girl the Squire up yonder made such a fuss about.”

“ Did he ?” the tramp cried with a savage glare in her eyes, which made the clerk fall back a step or two.

“ Eh !” said Simon. “ Do you know I think you had much better get into the next parish. Now do.”

“ There I am quiet,” explained the tramp with a look of entreaty. “ Oh, I can, I will be so quiet ; only pray, pray let me see my darling’s grave.”

Simon paused, puffed away at his pipe, looked round him, got up, and went into his house. The tramp stood waiting anxiously to see if he would return. In a minute more she gave a sigh of relief as he reappeared, now wearing his coat. As he opened the

gate and went out, he beckoned the tramp to follow him. Then there was a little laugh among the apprentices. Quick as lightning Simon had turned, and had scowled a scowl terrible enough to keep a whole congregation grave for at least a fortnight. And then the two moved off together.

By-and-by they came to the churchyard-gate. He opened it, and she passed in. Then he turned round, and asked,

“You are *quite* sure it wouldn't be better for you to get into the next parish?”

She answered his question with a piteous look.

“Well, well,” he said ; “I don't want to be too hard upon you. There, it's over there.”

She would have thanked him, but he had gone before she had time to utter the words. She stood still for a moment, looking across the graves. Then she heard a loud shout behind her. She turned round, and found a

crowd of boys hooting and shouting and running towards her. The village school had just been released from their studies. She walked or rather tottered towards the spot pointed out to her by Simon Butler, but the boys were too quick for her. They came hallooing along the dusty road, swarmed over the gate, and soon were thronging in the calm churchyard. Cries of "Witch !" and "Thief !" soon rose on the air, but still the old woman pursued her way. Growing bold by impunity, the boys changed their clamour for stones. The poor creature, not yet struck, still limped along. At last one boy, more bold and brutal than the rest, seized her by the shawl, and a shout of laughter from his companions rewarded the waggish feat. In another second he was sprawling and yelping on the ground, and a young man with white hair was belabouring with a cane the backs of the youthful mob. Soon routed by this vigorous attack, the

boys dispersed, and Leopold was left alone with the cause of the tumult.

The shadow of the Ruthven monument, which had for years fallen upon the little grave beside it, now fell upon a wretched woman who lay across the mound in an agony of tears, crying,

“ My love, my darling, have I found you at last !”

CHAPTER IX.

FATHER DUTTON, LATE CAPTAIN OF THE
“Q.D.G.”

FATHER DUTTON had said Low Mass for his little congregation, and was in the sacristy taking off his robes. The simple ritual of the Roman Catholic Church was over for the day; but the work of the good priest had only just begun. The Father had his visiting to do, his sick to comfort, and his poor to relieve. Men-about-town would have smiled to have seen him marching out of the chapel in his threadbare coat and napless beaver, for they would have remembered the days when the worthy ecclesiastic was a

giver of "wines" at Oxford—and (a little later) a leader of cavalry charges in the Crimea. They would have remembered the time when his back had donned a coat built by Poole, instead of a cassock made of worn-out serge,—had shown a helmet on his head, in lieu of a tonsure. His admission to the Roman Church had been "a nine days' wonder," and many had been the prophecies that Dick Dutton would soon get "bored" with the priesthood, and "give the whole thing up." Somehow or other, Dick had done nothing of the sort, and, really, if the truth must be told, had effected more good as a Roman Catholic minister than he could possibly have achieved by spending his morning in the Row, and his evenings behind the scenes at the Opera. This fact may give great scandal to *very* good Protestants, but then (fortunately for the world—to say nothing of the flesh and the—h'em—well never mind) not all Protestants *are* very good, and

these last will take a lenient view of the matter. Father Dutton had crept, or rather marched, into popularity. It is true, he had met with some opposition at first from the shining lights of the village public-house, who supported the National Church of England by avoiding church, getting very drunk, and stoning "the Papist." Unhappily (for the aforesaid shining lights), there was more of the Dragoon than the priest about Father Dutton at the time of these demonstrations, and he consequently acknowledged them by soundly thrashing every soul—or rather body—concerned in the celebration of the latter part of the ceremony. The Vicar of the Parish, who happened to be a Muscular Christian, and an excellent man, was much struck by this display of "pluck," and immediately sought the Father's acquaintance. A firm friendship quickly followed. The two clergymen "agreed to differ" upon theological matters, but on all other subjects were wonderfully unanimous.

Having once gained the good-will of the rector, the esteem of the parishioners followed as a matter of course.

As I have said before, Father Dutton was preparing to leave the chapel on his road to visit his sick. He had donned his threadbare coat and was taking up his old umbrella, when a young man, with light downy whiskers and a turn-up nose, appeared at the door of the sacristy. This youth, who wore a livery jacket and waistcoat and a pair of dark blue trousers, looked in and said in a rude manner,

“I say, are you the Romish priest?”

Father Dutton, who seemed rather surprised, turned round, stared at the intruder, and answered leisurely,

“Yes; what do you want with me?”

“Why, Mr. Lees, the surgeon, says there’s a woman lying at his house dying, who belongs to you Papists. She’s calling for a priest, and so you are to come.”

“Certainly,” said the Father calmly. The young man moved away, but was soon stopped by a commanding voice saying, “Here, my good fellow, I want to say a few words to you.”

The “good fellow” looked extremely surprised, and gave a long low whistle.

“How dare you make that noise in my presence, Sir?” This was said sharply, and reduced the “young fellow” to a respectful silence. Dutton continued, “I don’t want to get you into trouble, my good man, but the next time you bring me a message from your master, be careful to be a little more respectful. Do you hear what I say?”

“Yes, Sir,” said the man, touching his hat.

“Very well. Now you may go.”

The fellow, thoroughly cowed and surprised, touched his hat again, and disappeared.

The worthy priest soon followed his ex-

ample. Carefully locking the door after him, he crossed the little graveyard, passed the gate, and got into the road. Walking briskly along, the house of Mr. Lees, the surgeon, soon came in view. He knocked at the door gently, and was shown in. The master of the house met him in the hall.

“My dear Dutton,” said the surgeon, “I’m afraid it’s a very bad case. Old woman,—tramp, you know—(didn’t like to cart her away to the Union five miles off;—died on the road)—exhaustion,—another word for starvation, —break up of the system, —no hope.”

“It was very good of you to take so much trouble about the poor creature.”

“Not at all,” replied Lees. “One can’t let a woman die in the streets. The stranger up at the Hall, Mr. Harwood, called me to her. She was very weak,—asked to see a priest,—I promised to get one,—sent for you.”

“I will go to her at once,” said Father Dutton, and, preceded by the surgeon, he mounted the staircase.

At the top of the house they came to a door, which, when opened, led into a small darkened bed-chamber. In a corner of the room lay (on a couch) an old woman, with iron-grey hair, and an ashy-pale countenance. The poor creature was moaning and tossing about. Every now and then she cried out, “Get me the priest—I am dying—I dare not die—get me the priest—I am dying—I dare not die!”

“My daughter!” said Father Dutton, laying his hand softly upon her shoulder; “My daughter, I am here.”

She looked up at him in terror, and then tried to shut out the sight with her hands. She trembled, and moaned, “I am too wicked, there is no hope for me—no hope—no hope.”

“My daughter,” said the priest, sitting

down at the bedside, "there is hope for every one of us."

She looked up at his kind, honest face, with greater confidence; he motioned the surgeon away, and the two were left alone.

"My daughter," said Father Dutton, "in the time of illness the weight of care is often too heavy for us to bear alone. Speak frankly; is there anything on your mind which you would like to tell me?"

"Yes, Father;" and she began a story which had a most curious effect upon the listener. The good priest listened, but with evident excitement as the tale proceeded; and, when the woman's voice was hushed, he started up and exclaimed,

"A great wrong has been worked, which must be undone. I must see him at once."

"Surely you would not dare?"

Father Dutton smiled, and, with a few cheering words of comfort and hope, left the room. Explaining to Lees that he was

obliged to go on an important mission, he took the road for Stelstead Hall. When he entered the Park he quickened his pace, as he heard the voice of Florence laughing and talking with some companion. His experience had taught him that this young lady was a consummate gossip, and being now engaged on a mission of life and death, he very naturally wished to avoid her. As ill luck would have it, in taking a short cut, he accidentally confronted her. She shook him warmly by the hand, and introduced him to her companion—Mr. Frederick Holston.

“Charmed to see you, I’m sure,” said the exquisite, with much drawl and more patronage.

“Now, Mr. Dutton, you are going to have a nice long chat with me, and tell me all the news,” cried Florence.

“My dear young lady,” replied the priest with a smile, “nothing would give me greater pleasure, but I am really very, very busy, and must run away.”

“Going to write a sermon, eh?” said Freddy, with a little laugh. “Come, you might forgive your congregation this once, and let them off.”

The priest glanced at Freddy, and addressed himself to Florence.

“You really must pardon me; I am very sorry, because I always enjoy a chat with you; but I have some most important business to transact with your uncle.”

“With Sir Ralph Ruthven!” exclaimed Freddy, annoyed at the priest’s indifference to his remarks. “I don’t think you will do much good there. He’s a staunch Protestant, and the Pope himself couldn’t pervert him. And you, you know, don’t call yourself the Pope.”

“I am afraid I must say good-bye,” said the priest to Florence.

“Well, good-bye then,” replied the young lady; “and, Mr. Holston, would you mind finding Uncle Ralph for Mr. Dutton?”

“I would do anything for *you*,” returned Freddy gallantly.

“Pray do not let me trouble you,” Father Dutton exclaimed.

“Oh! no trouble at all,” said Freddy, in an offhand manner.

The priest smiled, and, bowing to Florence, followed Holston through the trees.

“I am afraid,” Freddy observed, for the sake of conversation, “that you must consider me a bad kind of fellow.”

“Not at all.”

“Oh, yes you do. I know you will hold me up to young men that you wish to make model young men as an example of all that is vicious and worldly. Now, won’t you?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Well, do you know,” said Freddy, with an uneasy smile, “I am rather anxious to learn what you *would* say about me to your model young men!”

“Well, if you press me,” replied the priest,

in a careless tone, "I should tell them (if I remembered the taste that characterized your remarks about my sermons and perversion) that you were 'bad form.'"

"What do you mean?" cried Freddy, turning crimson.

"Only this," said the priest, looking at him carelessly, "that you have been rather uncivil to me, and without any reason that I know of; and as we *have* got upon the subject, I may take this opportunity of telling you, Mr. Holston, that although I live here in retirement, I have lots of friends in my old regiment who occasionally post me up in London affairs. Now, I have heard of you; and that being the case, I am sure you will not feel surprised or hurt if I inform you that I really had rather not know you,—in fact, I won't know you. So please don't speak to me again."

He turned upon his heel with an unmistakable "plunger" air, leaving the patron-

izing Freddy lost in the lowest depths of amazement.

When the Father reached the house, he sent up his name.

Learning that the baronet could not see him, he sat down and scribbled the following lines :—

“(Private.)

“Dear Sir Ralph,—I have to call upon you to make a great reparation you owe to the dead. When I tell you that Emma Barlow lies dying at Dr. Lees’ house, you will fully understand my meaning. For Heaven’s sake, come at once.

“Yours faithfully,

“RICHARD DUTTON.”

CHAPTER X.

“TRUST HER NOT.”

AFTER Freddy had left her, Florence strolled under the trees of the Park, humming a soft song. Her azure eyes gazed listlessly about her; her golden hair flowed down her shoulders, restrained only by a tiny blue ribbon. The sunshine poured down through the branches of the stately oaks, and, as she emerged out of their shadows, flooded her with a haze of glory. Beautiful as an angel, thoughtful as a virgin saint, she moved along like a spirit of the air, scarcely touching with her feet the daisy-dotted sward.

Then she stood still, and her eyes filled with tears; her thoughts belonged to the past,—that past of faithless vows and broken love she knew so well. Sorrow, sincere sorrow, rested for a moment in her fickle, frivolous heart, and deepened (as she remembered the sad silence that followed her passionate words to Leopold) into despair—despair for the moment as hopeless as her life now seemed to be. As I see her thus, I can but pity her; as I see her thus, I can but forgive her. False as the water, fatal as the sea, still she is beautiful and loveable! I write this, because I am a hard, stern man, and not a gentle, loving woman; were I the latter, I might pick pretty Florence to pieces, find out her smallest faults, and turn them into the greatest crimes,—laugh her acknowledged virtues to most bitter scorn, and drag her very beauty through the dust. But I am not a gentle, loving woman, (worse luck!) so I write according to my lights!

As she stood thus, a shadow fell upon the grass beside her, and Edith's voice was heard saying,

“ My darling !” But two words, and yet meaning comfort, hope, sympathy, undying affection.

“ Oh, Edith !” cried Florence, throwing herself into her sister's arms, “ I love him, I love him, and he hates me !”

A spasm of pain passed over Edith's noble, suffering face ; but she patted her sister's cheek, as a mother would a much-loved child.

“ I did not know my heart till now,” the girl murmured, with many a sob. “ Edy darling, I was cruel and ungrateful, and—oh, he will never forgive me, he *can* never forgive me !”

“ Florence dear,” said Edith, with a pale, pale face and a sad, sad sigh, “ I did not know it was so bad as this. I hoped, darling, that you had forgotten him.”

“No, no ; never !” the younger girl cried out passionately.

“Is it really so ? Can you really be true to him,—do you really love him ?”

“I do, I do ! Oh, Edy, help me—help me, my sister, or I shall die !”

Another spasm of pain crossed Edith’s face, and then the poor woman (only she knew *how* poor !) spoke in a calm, loving voice,

“I will help you, darling.” Florence looked up at her half in surprise, half in gratitude. “Yes, darling, I will help you if you will be true to yourself. I have striven hard to prevent this ; I have prayed to Heaven to avert it. But it was to be ! My poor motherless love, it is not for me to distress you ; rather should I help you with all my heart and soul, and I will, darling, I will !”

Oh, dear, generous Edith ! my best of sisters, my”—

“Don’t speak to me, dear, like that.

Don't call me generous; I am giving up something that I never had. He never loved me, darling !”

And then, poor woman, she fairly cried !

* * * * *

Lying beside the river, close to the rustic bridge; lying there as he had rested, oh, years and years ago ! The same bridge, the same sky, the same trees, the same streamlet,—but yet how changed ! Throwing the leaves into the water, watching them as if they carried his happiness away. Eyes sightless for the present and gazing only into the wretched Past,—voiceless and alone, hopeless and heartless. For men *will* feel and hearts *will* break, in spite of the cynic's (is *his* heart whole ?) laughter and the worldling's scorn. And if this be so, why should I not write of it ? Why should I scoff at sentiment, and declare my unbelief in anything save £. s. d. and the rate of dis-

count? The world has many things in it besides Money and Humbug. Oh, I know lies are fashionable, and I admit that I've been guilty of uttering a common, vulgar piece of truth,—too vulgar, perhaps, for everybody; but then *somebody* must be displeased in this wicked world of ours.

Leopold sighed, and was about to rise from the ground, when his hand was caught up and pressed to a throbbing heart.

“ Oh, my darling ! ” a voice trembling with passion and love was heard to say ; “ forgive me ! oh, *do, do* forgive me ! I can't live without your pardon ! I don't deserve it, but I have suffered, oh, so much ! Pray, my own dear darling, forgive me ! Do, or I shall die ! ”

He would have answered her, but Freddy was heard singing in the distance a song, which as he neared them became more distinct. The words of this song ran as follows :—

“ I know a maiden fair to see,
 Take care, take care ;
She can both false and friendly be,
 Beware, beware ;
Trust her not, oh, trust her not,
For she is fooling thee !”

CHAPTER XI.

SIR RALPH TRAVELS BY NIGHT!

A ROUGH night.

The wind whistled through the trees with a sad, low moaning, the clouds floated across the moon in quick succession. The Old Manor House had lights in some of its windows; but outside it was cold and dark and dreary. A rough night—a very rough night.

Dinner was over, and the Ruthven family and their guests were seated in the drawing-room. Four out of the five persons present were very silent, but the fifth was as talka-

tive as the rest were reticent: of course it was our friend Freddy who thus monopolized the conversation. But it was up-hill work even for him to pass the evening, and to kill the hours as they were slowly marked by the clock on the mantelpiece; for Sir Ralph was moody and silent, and the girls were silent and moody, and Leopold was absent to the last degree. However, our friend made a gallant attempt to be amusing.

“Well, Sir Ralph,” he said, addressing the baronet, “how’s the country? I know more about London ‘hops’ than country wheat, but I am quite prepared to hear all about the corn trade.”

The old man stared at Freddy, and then his eyes were slowly raised to the mantelpiece, where ticked the clock so slowly and steadily.

“Yes,” assented Holston as if the baronet had made some remark; “yes, very pretty. Who is it supposed to be? Time I imagine

with the scythe, eh? Disagreeable notion, being cut down with such an instrument. How bored Time must be with his everlasting hay-making! Surely this clock is wrong,—it must be later than half-past nine?”

“No, no, no,” murmured Sir Ralph; “it goes too fast; time goes too fast—much—much too fast!”

“Quite so,” said Freddy with a smile, “especially in the country;” and then he approached Florence, who was making a pretence of working on some fancy knitting, and began to talk to her.

“Terribly difficult, I should say,” he observed; “what’s it for?”

“A purse,” she replied, without raising her eyes.

“Awfully useful, I have no doubt, to some people; but a pocket-book would suit me better, with a very large compartment in it for bill stamps. You like working, Miss Florence?”

“It’s something to do.”

“Quite so; and I am the only lazy one in the room. See how studiously your sister is reading,—and look at Harwood over there, one would say that he was thinking out a sermon.”

She did look at Lawson; their eyes met, and she dropped hers hurriedly, and a blush mantled in her cheek.

“So, so,” murmured Freddy to himself; and then he said aloud, “You will scarcely believe it, Miss Florence, but I am learning to sing.”

“Oh, I can believe anything of you!” she replied, with a return of her old manner.

“Would you be very, very angry if I went over a song I’m trying to master? I only know one, and I am trying to learn another, as I find that every fellow knows the one I know, and it’s rather a bore to take a song with you to a ‘music small-and-early,’ and then find three other fellows have

also brought the song with them,—especially when the song's a sentimental one, and can't be sung as a chorus."

"Oh, by all means; I haven't the smallest objection."

"Oh, thanks, very much. May I ask a very great favour? Do you mind accompanying me? I am sorry to say I only play on the triangle (an accomplishment which I learned when I was a small boy at school), and I haven't brought the instrument down with me."

Florence smiled, rose, and went to the piano. Freddy approached a table upon which was a vase containing flowers; he leant over it and said,

"How beautiful! May I steal one?"

Florence nodded with a smile. Freddy selected a little bunch and placed them in his buttonhole. Then he continued with an air of burlesque entreaty.

"And poor Harwood—mayn't he have

some? Do please let poor Harwood have some!"

"You may give Mr. Harwood some if you like!"

Freddy laughingly selected a bunch, and said with a smile,

"Mr. Harwood, please, Miss Florence says you are to have these."

Leopold took the flowers absently and held them in his hand carelessly,—Florence bit her lip and sat down to the piano. Freddy regarded her sharply and took up a piece of music paper.

"Well, what do you want me to play for you?"

"Only this—it's a song by Longfellow—not a very new one, but I like it and sing it. Rather hard upon the composer, I know; but he is not here to call me out for the injury I do him."

She turned over the leaves, and then he began to sing the song he had hummed in

the morning. While she was playing the first verse, Florence blushed and her lips trembled. Freddy did not seem to notice her emotion, but sang the song as calmly and as evenly as if he had been intoning a Gregorian chant.

“That’s not so bad,” he said when the first verse was over; “I begin to respect myself. A little more tune would have been better in the last ‘beware,’ I admit, but then my voice never *would* go above ‘K.’”

And he began again:—

“She has two eyes of heavenly blue,
Take care! take care!
And what she says it is not true,
Beware! beware!
Take care! take care!
Trust her not, oh, trust her not,
For she is fooling thee!”

“Not so good as the first verse,” Freddy commented; “but not bad. Better next time. The second ‘beware’ still a little shaky.”

Florence's eyes were bent over the keyboard, and Leopold seemed strangely affected by the words of the song. Freddy gazed at them both with a sharp, quick look. Florence threw a timid glance at Leopold before she commenced the third verse, and then her eyes sought the piano once more.

"Now, Miss Ruthven, Señor Frederico de Holsteno will surpass all his previous efforts." And he began once more.

"She has some hair so soft and brown,
 Take care! take care!
 She gives a side glance and looks down,
 Beware! beware!
 Take care! take care
 Trust her not, oh, trust her not,
 For she is fooling thee!"

"Oh, look!" said Freddy, nodding towards Leopold, "why Harwood will destroy those flowers. See, in his deep thought, he's pulling them to pieces. Here, Harwood, is that the way you treat Miss Florence's gift? For shame, Sir; where's your gallantry?"

Leopold, recalled to himself, hurriedly and (to tell the truth) rather clumsily made an attempt to put the flowers in his button-hole.

“He will quite spoil them,” said Freddy. “Have pity upon him, Miss Ruthven, and pin them in for him.”

Florence with a smile and a slight blush rose and approached Leopold.

“Can I assist you?” she said, and taking the flowers from his hands, she pinned them in for him. His eyes were turned away as he accepted the proffered courtesy.

“Thank you,” he said; but the words sounded hard and harsh in her ears. She left him with a soft sigh and returned to the piano.

“Only one verse more, Miss Florence,” said Freddy; “only think of that. You don’t know how soon the ordeal will be over. I will try to get up to ‘L’ this time.”

And he began;

“She gives thee a garland woven fair,
Take care! take care!
It is a fool’s cap for thee to wear :
Beware! beware!
Take care! take care!
Trust her not, oh, trust her not,
For she is fooling thee!”

Florence rose from the piano and slowly resumed her work. She glanced at Leopold once more, and his face was as cold and as hard as marble.

“Great Heavens!” she thought; “is he really lost to me for ever!” and then she had to smile once more as Freddy recommenced his tattle. Put on thy mask, poor girl! and wear it bravely, for cruel eyes are gazing upon thee and watching thy heart in its agony!

Soon after this the last good-night was said, and the little household retired to rest.

* * * * *

It was late now, for eleven o’clock had

struck at the belfry behind the trees. The wind whistled through the leaves, and swept past the Old Manor House, now dark and cheerless in the cold night air. Very lonely and sad was nature in this her hour of coming passion. The wind whistled sharply through the trees, and died away. There was a pause, and then a heavy rain-drop fell from the dark, threatening clouds, and the storm began. Rain, rain, rain, flash upon flash, and roll after roll. For a moment the drawing-room of Stelstead Hall was ablaze with sharp white light, and then all was darkness. The thunder crashed overhead, the rain fell in a fierce shower; it seemed as if a second deluge had arrived. After awhile the storm expended its might, and nature regained her composure. The rain-drops still fell from the leaves of the trees, but the moon rose high in the heavens, and it was comparatively calm.

As the storm was subsiding, a figure

emerged from one of the rooms in the corridor, and a light step was heard on the stairs. Soon a woman glided into the drawing-room, and began looking about her, as if for a book. She carried no light, and was clothed in a long morning gown; her hair fell about her shoulders in graceful *abandon*, and the moonbeams, as she stood beneath a window, tinged with silver features as lovely as they were noble. Seemingly unable to find the subject of her search, she was about to return to her room when the noise of the opening of a door in the distance fell upon her ear. She stood quite still, and listened intently. The door closed gently, and then a heavy step was heard on the corridor—down the stairs. The woman stood still in the deep shadow that edged the moonbeams, and waited for the new-comer to pass her.

A man in a broad-brimmed hat, and muffled up to the throat, walked feebly down

the stairs with steps uncertain and feet that trembled beneath him. Slowly came this shambling, ungainly figure towards the drawing-room door, and the woman listened with bated breath as he approached her. By-and-by he passed under the window into the moonlight, and his face was discovered to her who waited so silently. She started back in surprise, and with difficulty mastered her emotion.

The man did not notice her but passed on—down the staircase—close to the large hall-clock—up to the front door. The white figure of the woman followed him with stealthy tread, and bated breath, and hands that trembled with excitement. He soon undid the bolts and lock that held the portal to its place, and then the door opened, and the moonlight streamed in upon his pale face and weak form, and he uncovered his head and stood quite still in the cold night air. As he rested thus, the woman crept

down the stairs, holding to the banisters and waiting to see what was to happen next. He in the silvery light—she in the shadow,—watcher and watched stood thus a moment, and then he passed out.

Along the terrace and over the gravel walk, which creaked and crushed beneath his tread. Down by the bushery and under the avenue of trees he hurried along. Never looking behind him, never stopping for a moment, the old man made his way, under dripping boughs, over wet rank grass, beside glistening hedgerows and swollen streams. Beneath the moonlight, beside the river, always onwards, never backwards, with thoughts that gave his poor weak body feverish strength, with a purpose that kept him from sinking, and all this while with a follower behind him, a pursuer clothed in white, who marked his every step, and watched his every movement.

Soon he had left the park and was walk-

ing along the highway. It was very still at this hour of the night; not a soul was to be seen, and the little cottages dotted here and there were as dark and as silent as the grave. He hurried on until at last he came to a house standing back from the road in its own grounds. This house was as dark and as silent as its humbler neighbours, the cottages hard by, with this exception, *they* were all dark, whereas *this* had one streak of light—a candle was evidently burning in a room on the top story.

When the man arrived at this spot and noticed the light glimmering in the window, he seemed to realize the object of his visit too vividly for his peace of mind. He stood still, and the beads of perspiration gathered on his brow, and he leant against a milestone.

“It was so long ago, oh, so long ago!” he murmured in deep distress.

He leant against the stone more heavily

than before, and his trembling hands were stretched forward in an attitude of weak entreaty; his features worked convulsively as he tried to master his emotion.

A light hand was laid upon his shoulder at this moment, and a steady voice asked,

“Uncle, what do you do here?”

He turned round sharply in an agony of terror, and confronted the figure of a woman draped in white.

“Edith!” he cried.

“Yes, Edith,” said the woman; “yes, Edith who has followed you, Edith who has seen you in your terror. Uncle, what do you do here?”

He looked at her with a wild glance, and seemed scarcely to understand her words, then he put his hand to his head and cried,

“Ah, Edith! good girl—all that’s left, all that’s left.”

“What do you do here?” again she questioned him.

He seemed to revive from a trance, and his words followed one another in quick succession.

“I was sent for, and must see her. Don’t leave me, Edith. It was so long ago, so long ago. I thought it dead, but it has come to haunt me, Edith. Don’t leave me, pray don’t leave me.”

The old man feebly approached her, and held her arm as if he were seeking for protection. She would have replied had not a light appeared at this moment in the staircase window, which left it but to reappear in the fan-light over the hall-door, and then to be seen, once more, in the entrance held by Father Dutton.

“You have kept your appointment, Sir Ralph,” said the priest, in a low tone; “I received your letter, and was prepared for you. She is awake, and will see you.”

Leaning upon his niece’s arm, the baronet tottered towards the doorway.

“Miss Ruthven !” cried the Father in surprise.

“She must be with me,” whined Sir Ralph in a peevish voice ; “she shall ; I will not go in without her.”

“So be it,” said the priest ; and uncle and niece passed into the house together.

CHAPTER XII.

“FOR HIS SAKE!”

UP the stairs, past the doors, into the sick-room. A strange group. First, the old man tremblingly holding to the arm of his niece, and looking from one face to another for comfort and support. Then the priest, in his black coat and grave features, with his professional composure and heart-felt compassion. But—greatest contrast of all—the two women, one old and sick unto death, the other young and full of life; one with the face of a demon and the claws of a harpy, the other with looks as bright and as

good as those of an angel ; one asleep and yet muttering fearful words, the other awake but still and silent as a marble statue.

They stood thus a moment, then the priest whispered —

“I am glad you have come, Sir Ralph ; it would have been cruel to have stayed away. She is dying.”

The baronet took a step towards the bed, and started back as the fearful face of the old woman met his gaze.

“Do you wish her to be present ?” once more whispered the priest, pointing to Edith.

“Is it a story for her ears ?”

“Yes, yes, yes,” whined Sir Ralph, impatiently ; “I daren’t be alone. Edith will help me to bear it—will help me to bear it.”

Father Dutton bowed, and, with one last glance towards Edith, approached the bed. He laid his hand gently upon the sleeping figure to rouse her. The old woman mur-

mured more fiercely in her dreams, sighed heavily, rubbed her eyes, and was awake.

Without uttering a word, the priest raised his hand, and pointed towards Sir Ralph. The moment the old woman saw the features of her visitor, her face was convulsed with passion; she sat up in her bed, and, with bony arm outstretched towards him, screamed in a low, hoarse voice, weak with illness but strong with hate,—

“Curse you !”

Then she fell back again, and her breathing was slow and laboured. Soon she fixed her eyes upon him again, and cried—but feebly, very feebly,—

“Yes, curse you, Sir Ralph, for the misery you have brought upon me and mine ! Curse you for your cold black heart ! Curse you for your devil-born pride ! Let blight fall upon your house, as it has fallen ! As it has fallen—leaving you childless ! As it has fallen—leaving you alone and deserted !

As it has fallen—leaving you old and dying !
A thousand times curse you, curse you !”

It was a horrible sight to see this miserable creature, so near to death, calling down vengeance upon the head of a fellow-sinner. It was doubly horrible because the woman’s voice was so weak, and her hate so strong. She almost whispered the words of vengeance, and yet they sounded in that still chamber as full of fire and warning as the angry hiss of a deadly serpent.

The priest approached the bed, and laid his hand upon the shoulders of the raging woman.

“Peace, my daughter,” he murmured ;
“peace, my daughter.”

“Peace !” she began again, “peace ! what peace has there been for me all these long years ? Peace ! what peace will there be for him for ever ?”

Still the priest held her arm, with hand upraised, and warning finger.

“Who is she?” suddenly cried the old woman, for the first time becoming conscious of the presence of Edith. “Who is she? Has she come here to mock me as I die?”

“I am here with my uncle, my poor creature,” said Edith kindly. “I am sorry to see you thus.”

“The same voice,” murmured the old hag, tossing in her bed; “the same voice, but more human—more human.”

There was a pause after this for a moment, and then the woman sat up in her bed, and, with flashing eyes and trembling lips, pointed towards Sir Ralph, and asked, in a voice harsh and weak, but commanding,—

“Where is my daughter? Tell me, man, what have you done with my daughter?”

The baronet quailed beneath the steady glance levelled at him,—quailed, and clung to his niece’s arm more closely.

“What have you done with my daugh-

ter ?” she cried again, with still greater excitement.

The priest approached her, but she would not be calmed, but kept pointing at the baronet, and muttering savage sounds.

With a glance at her uncle, who leant heavily on her arm, Edith addressed the woman.

“What do you want ?” she asked. “Cannot you see that my uncle is old and ill, and unable to answer you ?”

“What do I want ?” echoed the hag savagely. “What do I want from him ? Why, my life and happiness. My only child—my daughter.”

“I don’t understand you,” faltered Edith.

“Then you shall,” cried the dying woman. “*He* stole her from me ! *HE* left me childless—worse than childless. Curse him, I say ; Heaven curse him !”

She leant back again, and breathed heavily. There was a silence in the room for a mo-

ment, and then she began again. She seemed to be describing some vision she saw before her.

“We were very happy before *he* crossed our path ! We struggled on together, hand in hand. We had our little cottage ; we had our work. She was neat and quick, and brought sunshine into the house with her. How happy we were ! oh, how happy !”

Again she leant back on the bed, and closed her eyes. Soon she turned round, and, then addressing herself to Edith, continued,—

“But not for long. *He* saw her, and envied her. He saw her, and determined to steal her. Curse him ! Heaven curse him !”

Another pause, and then again the weak, angry voice.

“He used to come—the black-hearted traitor !—to our little cottage, and dog her steps as she carried home the work. How could she believe him base, poor girl ? She

was a hard-working woman, without a friend but her mother in the world ; he, a noble young gentleman at college. How could she believe him false, poor child ? How could she imagine him a miserable, pitiful cur ?”

Again the old woman was silent, and her breathing was laboured. Soon, however, once more the weak, angry voice.

“I am nearly done, young lady. It’s an old story, that has often been told before. He conquered !—conquered !—brought ruin to an honest family, shame and death to a blameless life. Conquered ! Look, as he stands there, cowering before me—look, I say, and see the conqueror !”

And she paused again, but her eyes were fixed upon him in rage and scorn.

“The old, old story. He treated her like a toy, and threw her away when he tired of her. He robbed me of my jewel, of my pet lamb. He left me to go down, down, down ;

to lose all hope, to lose all work, to sink, to drink, to come to this !”

She fell back upon the bed, and put her skinny hands before her eyes. For a few moments only, and then she began again.

“But I still live. I am dying ; but I still live ! I have traced my poor child from place to place ; followed up the thread carefully and steadily, sometimes with hope, sometimes in despair ; and I have found her at last—in the churchyard !”

Another pause, and then—

“Oh, how my throat burns ! How my heart throbs ! I cannot die—I must not die—until I have spoken. Quick ! She has left a child. For that child’s sake I have summoned you here, Sir Ralph Ruthven. I speak in the name of my dead daughter, and command you—command you, do you hear ?—to succour your own flesh and blood—to save my daughter’s son.”

The old man had stood trembling by the

side of his niece, but now he approached the bedside himself. He said, in a weak voice,—

“I am not so bad as you think. Your daughter was my lawfully wedded wife.”

The old woman turned upon him sharply, and cried,

“Oh, you coward, you base cruel coward ! and you allowed her to die in need, and to run away in shame ! You coward, you base cruel coward !”

“I was obliged to tell her that the marriage was illegal ; I was indeed. I was poor then, and we should have died together. I could not have supported her. You would not have had me let her starve !”

It was a pitiful sight to see this trembling, selfish, wicked man, in his lonely old age, attempting to justify the devilry of his youth. It was horrible to listen to the hag’s cry of—

“You base cruel coward ! oh, you base cruel coward !”

The priest interposed.

“ You say you married her, Sir Ralph,— where ?”

“ St. Laurence’s Church, Barnworth. And I thought I was acting for the best. Indeed I did ! We should have starved together. You would not have had your daughter starve !”

There was a pause, and then the old woman asked, with difficulty,

“ Quick ! I feel death numbing me ? Your son ? What became of your son ?”

“ He is lost to me,” answered the baronet, “ everything is lost to me. I kept his parentage secret, for I had another son ; but, while I could, I protected him.”

“ Quick ! My life is leaving me. I feel the dew of death upon my forehead. His name ? Quick ! Tell me his name,” murmured the hag, and her face was convulsed with a spasm.

The baronet whispered a couple of words.

Just in time, for she threw up her arms, clasped her throat with her hands, tried hard to breathe, and fell back. Her eyes started out of her head, there was a gurgling in her throat, her jaw dropped, and all was still.

“She is dead,” said the priest.

The baronet shuddered, and turned round. Edith was standing behind him in a very trance of deep terrible thought. Since he had whispered the name of his son she had not moved a muscle.

“Come, Edith,” he said, and took her arm.

They left the chamber of death, the house, and were, once more, in the cold night-air.

They walked on together. The old man weak and tottering, and buried in thought ; Edith silent and sad, and as pale as a spectre. Retracing their steps, they soon made their way back to the old Manor

House, under the still dripping trees, over the creaking gravel, into the hall with its loudly ticking clock, and large family portraits. Up the staircase into the corridor. Then Sir Ralph kissed his niece, and walked away, with trembling steps, to his own room.

Edith stood still for a moment, and then moved away down the corridor. She opened a door, and entered her apartment. She walked slowly to the window and threw it open. She stood looking out into the night, and then she seemed to waken from a trance. Her eyes, which had been fixed in terror, moved wildly, she put her hands to her head, and seemed to realize, for the first time, some terrible calamity. "Great Heavens!" she cried, "it is too terrible. If it can be true!"

She sat down before the window looking out into the night, and thinking, oh, so deeply. Thus she rested for hours, until the

morning light began to redden the eastern sky. Then she rose and raised her eyes to heaven. “Give me strength, O my God!” she cried, “it must be done; to save him, yes, to save him!”

CHAPTER XIII.

MELCHISIDECK, THE MONEY-LENDER.

It must not be thought that John Barman, the detective recommended by Marcus Perks to Leopold Lawson, had been idle all this while. On the contrary, he had been most busy in the service of his employer. He was not a great man, nor a particularly clever man; but he was steady and laborious, and was blessed with a long head and a shrewd wit.

It was early in the week, in the King's Road, Chelsea, and early in the morning. The shops were open, it is true; but the

shopmen were half asleep and yawning. The shutters had been buried away by the errand boy, and the various wares were displayed to public view; but the public had not done their breakfasts, and the pavement was deserted. So much for the King's Road commercial; not so for the King's Road private. It was a busy hour for the maids-of-all-work. The summer time had come, bringing with it lodger impatience and landlord bullying. It seems to me that London at the end of August is so deserted that even Charity flies away—perhaps to the seaside. Be this as it may, it was a particularly hard time with Susanna Anne, the general servant of — King's Road, Chelsea.

“Been at the sugar again?” grumbled a loutish-looking man, of some forty years and a couple of carrotty whiskers. “Been at the sugar again?”

The speaker was not particularly prepossessing. He was fair and florid, a little fat,

and not a little short-winded. He had a "hang-dog" expression about him, and was dressed untidily. In fact, he was about the last man in the world you would have taken for a detective—in a novel.

The poor maid-servant looked up scared into her accuser's face, and cried, "I am sure, Mr. Barman, I wouldn't go for to do such a thing—no, not for untold gold!"

"Don't come the blarney over me, young woman," said the detective sternly. "You can't gammon me. When I says a thing, I mean it: and I says you've been at the sugar. Ugh! I hope it will poison you."

He scowled at the trembling "slavey," took up the 'Daily Telegraph,' and began to read its contents.

"There ain't much in this," he observed, with a scowl at the print; "what ain't advertisements is bosh from Paris, and what ain't bosh from Paris is advertisements! As for the leader, it will take a cleverer

detective than I to find out what *that* means."

A speech which amply proves that Mr. John Barman was in a particularly bad temper. For what Briton in his senses would carp at the 'Daily Telegraph,' a paper that boasts the best news, the finest contents, and the largest circulation in the wide, wicked world?

The detective grumbled a little more, and then prepared to leave his house. He put on his coat (up to this time, he had been sitting in his shirt-sleeves), gave his hair a twist before the looking-glass, scowled once more at the "slavey," and took himself out into the King's Road, on the top of an omnibus *en route* for the Adelphi. He sat on the box, next to a talkative City man who *would* enter into conversation with him, much to his disgust, and greatly to the increase of his surliness. When he got down in the Strand, his box companion

gave a sigh of relief, and said to the driver,

“Do you know who that—h’em—gentleman is?”

“To be sure I do,” answered the omnibus man; “that’s Mr. Barman, the detective.”

“You don’t say so!” murmured the passenger with a look of the greatest surprise, “why I never met a duller man in my life! That fellow find out a murder! why I would sooner go to the Asylum for Idiots for assistance than to him.”

“Well,” said the driver, “he ain’t much of a hand for murders and them kind of things, but he does a werry tidy business, they tell me, in divorce cases, and such-like *genteel* matters.”

And the omnibus drove off Citywards.

Barman, in the meanwhile, had turned down one of the streets leading out of the Strand, and was standing in front of a window containing a wire blind, upon which

appeared the words "MOSES MELCHISIDECK, WINE MERCHANT; OFFICE HOURS, 10 TO 4."

"It's a burning shame," growled the detective, reading the words; "the scoundrel is as good a Christian as Old Nick himself, and yet he must try to pass off for a Jew! I suppose he does it to hint that no one need enter his place who ain't ready to fork out sixty per cent. However, it ain't my cue to quarrel with him."

He walked into the house, and found a door facing him upon which was written, in large white letters, "CLERK'S ROOM;" to his right was a second door, labelled "PRIVATE." He turned the handle nearest to him, walked in, and found himself in the apartment sacred to Mr. Melchisideck's subordinates. There was only one person in the room, a little old man, with a sharp hungry face and shifty crafty eyes, who sidled up to the counter that divided the public part of the place from the private, and who said, when

he saw the detective, in a voice that sounded half-threat, half-erige,

“What is it? Mr. Melchisideck ain’t at home, Sir, but won’t I do as well?”

“No, you won’t,” replied Barman shortly.

“Well, then,” said the old man, “I am afraid you must call again; Mr. Melchisideck is so very seldom here though, that I think you had better see if I wouldn’t do. Come, now, isn’t it a little pressure, eh? Well, money is scarce, but I dare say if you could give me a couple of *good* names—mind, *good* names, I could—”

“Nonsense!” interrupted the detective; “just take my name into your master, and make no more ado about it. Say John Barman wants to see him.”

The visitor looked so determined to stay until he had seen the “master” in question, that the old man thought it advisable to obey the order. So with many assurances that he was quite certain that Mr. Melchisi-

deck wasn't in, he disappeared behind a third door, and soon returned with an invitation from the "Wine Merchant" to enter the presence. Passing by the clerk, who now treated him with studied respect, the detective availed himself of the permission given him, and entered the sanctum.

It was a strange room for a wine-merchant. There were a number of tin cases, such as one sees in a lawyer's office, and not a few flashy pictures, purporting to be the work of the old masters, but probably the labour of some modern sign-painter; and there were some chairs of different sizes and centuries, a lot of old armour, a desk, and last, but not least, a number of filed bills and accounts. Melchisideck was seated at the desk, surrounded by a number of papers, and close to a wicker-work basket.

"Just sit down a moment, Mr. Barman, and I will attend to you directly."

The detective took a chair, dropped into

it, and sat looking at the ceiling. Melchisedek went on with his work with great rapidity, docketing this and putting a total to that, until in a few minutes' time he was able to lay down his pen, turn round in his chair, and exclaim,

“Well?”

He was certainly not a Jew, but in spite of Barman's panegyric, he certainly was not a pleasant specimen of a Christian. He had a pale, unwholesome complexion, and little eyes that winked without any apparent reason, and hair that was lank and red and untidy. He was very short, wore gorgeous clothing in the “Champagne Charlie” style, and boasted some splendid (as far as the size was concerned) jewellery, and some finger-nails that apparently had never felt the weight of a nail-brush. In fact, he looked an unmitigated cad—the sort of fellow that even Selkirk on his deserted island would have “cut” without hesitation, for

fear of being seen with him by the cannibals !

He looked at Barman with the apology for a smile, and repeated,

“ Well, Sir, and what can I do for you to-day ? ”

“ I’ve come here on a little matter of business, Mr. Melchisideck, and hope as you will deal fairly with me.”

“ To be sure, to be sure, Mr. Barman ; although I must say I never in the whole course of my life knew money to be so scarce as it is just now.”

“ So your clerk told me.”

“ What ! *he* tried to do business with you, eh ? Oh, the thief, the scoundrel ; the bad, ungrateful, *imprudent* man ! ”

He uttered the last epithet in a most malicious tone, and his little eyes winked more than ever.

“ ‘ Like master, like man,’ you know, Mr. Melchisideck,” said Barman with a laugh.

“He’s caught your business-like habits; thought he saw a fish, and spread his net accordingly.”

“Well, well,” replied Melchisideck, regaining his composure, “we won’t be too hard upon him. We won’t call him names; we’ll only say he is imprudent—just the least bit imprudent. But there, that’s enough; and now for your business, Mr. Barman. A little pressure, eh? Delighted to do anything for you, I am sure, if you will get me two *good* names; mind, *good* names.”

“No, thanks,” said the detective; “I don’t want any of your money, Mr. Melchisideck; it’s rather too dear for me—can’t afford it just now.”

“You always would have your joke, Mr. Barman,” replied the wine-merchant with a giggle. “Perhaps you’ve come to lend *me* some money, eh? Ha, ha, ha!”

“Say ‘give,’ and you’ll have about hit the right nail on the head.”

“I didn’t know you were so charitable. Well, money is very scarce just now, and voluntary contributions will be gratefully received.”

“Well, I can’t exactly say as how my contribution will be exactly voluntary, Mr. Melchisideck, seeing as how I want to buy something of you.”

“Buy something of me !” said the other with an assumption of surprise. “I’m afraid I can’t oblige you ; but to tell the truth (it’s very awkward, and I’m very sorry), I’ve no more wine left ; the next cargo from Spain won’t be here for at least a month.”

Barman winked, rose from his chair, went to the door, and opened it. Having assured himself that the clerk was not listening, he returned to his chair, and faced Melchisideck.

“I don’t want to buy any wine,” he said, “nor yet pictures, nor any gimcracks. I want to buy some bills !”

“Some bills !” exclaimed the other, with

well-acted surprise. "Why you're surely not going to turn bill-discounter, Mr. Barman?"

"Never you mind what I am going to turn," retorted the detective, with a dash of his habitual surliness; "I know my business, and I tell you what I want to buy. Now the question is, have you any bills to sell?"

"Well," said Melchisideck, playing with his pen, "I dare say, in the course of my trade, I have received an occasional acceptance; but then, you see, I don't want to part with them. It might annoy my customers, you know."

"Oh, you may be sure I will treat your customers tenderly, Mr. Melchisideck,—almost as tenderly as you would yourself, Mr. Melchisideck," rejoined Barman with a laugh. "If you have the bills I want, mark my words, we both 'll make a pretty penny out of them."

"Well, Mr. Barman," observed the money-

lender with a grin, “ you know there’s no one I would sooner oblige than you ; so, without more ado, what’s the name of the party ?”

The detective bent his head towards Melchisideck’s ear, and said in a low voice,—

“ Have you any bills with Mr. Cumberland Kenny’s endorsement upon them ?”

“ What ! the chief-auditor of the Paupers’ Property Office ?”

“ That’s the party, Sir.”

“ Well,” said Melchisideck, after some consideration, “ I think I have ; but as he is a *very* particular friend of mine, and as I wouldn’t for worlds offend him, you’ll have to pay a good round sum before I part with any of *his* acceptances.”

“ Name your price, Sir, and I dare say we sha’n’t have many words about it.”

Melchisideck rose from his chair and walked to an iron safe that rested in a corner of the room. When he stood before it, he put his hand into his waistcoat pocket,

and produced a key. In a moment more the safe was open, and Melchisideck held a small bundle of papers in his hand. With this he returned to his chair.

“What do you say to this to begin with?” said he, holding out a bill.

“Not bad,” replied Barman, looking at it. “It’s for fifty. I’ll give you seventy. Come, now, that’s generous.”

“Why, I wouldn’t take one hundred and seventy for it.”

“You’re joking,” retorted Barman. “Business is business all the world over, Mr. Melchisideck. You’re laughing at me.”

“Not a bit of it,” returned the bill discounter, with great glee. “It’s quite worth two hundred to you; I might charge three fifty, but I never could bear usury. Just look at the name at the bottom of the bill, and say if it isn’t worth every penny of the money.”

Thus urged, Barman, who had risen from

his chair with the intention of taking his departure, approached Melchisideck and looked at the bill carelessly. His eyes rested on the signature to which his attention had been called, and then his demeanour changed entirely. He gave a start of pleasure and surprise. He grinned at the bill-discounter, and extracted from his pocket a note-book.

“It’s worth every penny of the money, as you say, Mr. Melchisideck.”

And, without further ado, the paper and notes changed hands. The bill was at three months’ date. It was endorsed “*Cumberland Kenny*,” and was signed, in a shaky, nervous handwriting, “*Richard Harwood*.”

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CUMBERLAND KENNY IS IMPRUDENT.

It was one o'clock at the Paupers' Property Office. The hungry clerks in their crowded, stifling rooms were casting hasty glances at the clock, and thinking of gorgeous dinners at ninepence the head (waiter included) to be eaten by-and-by at City ordinaries beyond St. Paul's Churchyard. The messengers were lounging about, picking up old pens (ordered to be sent in to the authorities by Paupers' Property Office Circular No. 27,149), and were blessing their stars that they had not been born clerks. The chiefs

of rooms were thinking of the illness of one of their "heads," and were speculating upon the probable promotion consequent upon his daily-expected and hourly longed-for demise. Last, but not least, Mr. Cumberland Kenny, the great Auditor-in Chief, was enjoying his lunch in his private room.

On this hot summer's day, the Paupers' Property Office was rather more wretched than usual. The rooms in which the poor clerks were huddled together, like ill-treated pigs in a badly ventilated sty, simply reeked with the weather. No wonder that the chiefs never used the letter "h"; there was no room for the abused aspirate in the overcrowded apartments of the office. No wonder that the lads on their benches were pale and ill; no, what surprised one was the startling fact that they actually were alive. No wonder that the work was badly performed; how it was ever performed at all was the mystery. Dear reader, believe me I write

from my heart when I bear record against this disgraceful spot. It has grown up among us and thrived through our love of greed. Every reduction in the Civil Service estimates has robbed a poor half-starved clerk of a few of his daily pence. Every bit of rubbish spoken from the Treasury Bench by sleek, clean-shaven Cabinet ministers about "economy" and "organization" has made the life harder for some broken-hearted, poverty-stricken gentleman. Every twaddling leader (the result of limited education and unlimited gin-and-water) that has appeared in a party newspaper about "reductions in the public service" has filched the food from the family of many a struggling Englishman. Out upon the cant that paints a Government clerk an idle fopling! Out upon the lie that declares him well paid and well contented! Out upon the disgraceful policy that permits such places as the Paupers' Property Office to have an exist-

ence for a moment ! “ But,” you say, “ the clerks don’t complain; they bear their wrongs in silence.” Granted. The lamb doesn’t complain, except by a scream, when you tie him by the feet and beat him brutally to death. But all the leader-writers in the world, all the Cabinet ministers in the kingdom, will never be able to prove before God such a deed noble, or one ever to be regarded with aught else but hearty hatred and deep disgust !

Having said my say, which may appear violent to those who do not know the kind of places I have feebly attempted to describe, I resume the thread of my story with a prayer that a stronger pen than mine, a better head than mine, a greater man than I, will some day join me in the fight, and obtain justice—simple justice—for the over-worked, browbeaten Government *employés* labouring in this year of grace, 1869, east of Temple Bar, Fleet Street, E.C.

As I have said before, Mr. Cumberland Kenny was enjoying his lunch. It had been brought to him on a tray, with a cruet-stand and a bottle of stout, and had been laid on a side-table a few paces distant from his official desk.

“Come,” said he to himself, “this ain’t ’alf bad ! Better than—”

And he broke off in his soliloquy, and smiled. There was a knock at the door at this point, and on his giving an invitation to the visitor to “come in,” a long, lanky man, with grizzled hair and a small moustache, entered the apartment.

“If it ain’t anythink very pertickler,” began Mr. Cumberland Kenny, “as I ain’t quite done my lunch, I wish yer would just look in again, Mr. Brownjones.”

“But it is something very pertickler, Sir,” said the new-comer, “very pertickler, indeed. I ’old in my ’and, Sir, a petition signed by six clerks, asking for more pay and better

accommodation ! In the 'ole course of my experience, I never 'eard of such a thing before !”

“I should think not !” replied Mr. Cumberland Kenny, looking very fierce. “This sort of thing must be put a stop to, Mr. Brownjones ; them clerks must be dismissed for insubornation, Sir,—d’ye 'ear ?—and at once ! Ask for more pay ! Why I never 'eard anythink more redicklus in my life ! Let 'em be dismissed, Sir ; let 'em be dismissed !”

And the Auditor-in-Chief fumed with indignation. His second in command, with a cringing bow, left the room, and the great man recommenced discussing his lunch. He was just finishing a glass of stout with much relish when he raised his eyes, and found a man standing in front of him.

“One of the publick, as I live,” he murmured, with a stare of haughty surprise ; and then he said aloud, “'Ere, you Sir, 'ow

came you 'ere? Ain't you aweer that you're intruding?"

"Not a bit," replied the man coolly, fetching a chair and seating himself in front of Mr. Cumberland Kenny; "not a bit."

"You're probably not aweer," said the Auditor-in-Chief pompously, "that none of the publick are admitted to this 'ere apartment without a special appointment. If yer wishes to leave a pauper £10,000, or 'ave 'eard anything fresh about the Jones Peerage which yer wishes to commoonicate, yer must do it by letter—do it by letter."

"I ain't here on public business, Mr. Dixon," replied his visitor, "I've come about a little private matter which can be settled in a very few minutes."

"I don't know what you mean by calling me Mr. Dixon," began the other indignantly.

"Oh, yes you do, Sir," replied the visitor quickly, "yes you do; to make matters short, I am John Barman, the detective."

If Mr. Cumberland Kenny had been shot through the heart, he could not have looked whiter or more scared than he did now. He gasped for air, and trembled.

“Don’t flurry yourself, Mr. Dixon, don’t flurry yourself; it’s quite on the cards that you and I may become very good friends, you’ve only to make this a matter of business, and all will yet be well.”

By this time, Mr. Cumberland Kenny had regained a little of his usual colour; he said, with an air of bluster that was evidently assumed with difficulty,

“I tell yer my name ain’t Dixon, and I wonder at your impudence at coming ’ere.”

“You won’t by-and-by, my dear Sir, but first let me chide you for your extravagance; you’ve been a-going it, Mr. Dixon, you’ve been a-going it a great deal too far.”

“What d’ye mean?”

“Why you know as well as I do, Mr. Dixon, what I mean,” continued the detec-

tive in a strain of banter ; “ and you must needs get into the hands of the sixty-percenters ; that was imprudent, Mr. Dixon, very imprudent.”

The Auditor-in-Chief grew very pale again, and gasped out once more—

“ What d’ye mean ?”

“ Simply this,” replied Barman, in a hard business-like tone, “ I hold in my hands a bill for £50 endorsed by you, and signed by Mr. Richard Harwood.”

Mr. Cumberland Kenny whiter still, and still more gasping—

“ Well ?”

“ A bill with two such names should be ample security for the money. However, this here particular bill is not nearly so valuable as it should be, for the simple reason that the signature of Mr. Richard Harwood is a forgery !”

It was painful to look at Mr. Cumberland Kenny now, as he trembled in his chair, with

his white scared face. Barman got up, and came a little closer to him.

“ Now, Mr. Dixon, you’re a man of business, and I may as well show you my cards at once. I tell you plainly, that if you don’t satisfy me before I leave this room, I shall take a cab on quitting the office, and trot off to the Mansion House, and shall there apply for a warrant against you.”

Mr. Cumberland Kenny’s thin parched lips moved convulsively. After two or three unsuccessful attempts to speak, for his voice had grown so weak that it failed him, he whispered hoarsely,

“ What am I to do ?”

“ Come, that’s business-like,” said the detective cheerily ; “ I see that we shall get on very well together. Well, all you have to do, Mr. Dixon, is to tell me all you know about the Raymond murder at Stelstead.”

The Auditor-in-Chief gulped off a glass of water, and rang the bell. When the mes-

senger appeared in answer to the summons, he gave orders that he was not to be interrupted until he rang again. When the man had gone, Mr. Cumberland Kenny walked up and down the room once or twice, and then sat down facing Barman.

“I am all attention, Sir,” said the detective, and the other began his story.

CHAPTER XV.

“VENGEANCE BE THINE, O LORD!”

THE day after Emma Barlow's death (which has already been described in these pages), Edith Ruthven sat late at breakfast in the morning-room of Stelstead Hall. Her eyes were heavy, and her cheeks were pale. Poor girl, she had suffered deeply during the night, and a painful task was still before her. Freddy, who had come down the last, had made a hasty meal, and had left the room *en route* for a fishing excursion. Florence was seen on the lawn,—only Leopold Lawson remained. He had (with the

permission of the ladies) read his letters, and he, too, now rose from the table, and prepared to go out.

“Can you spare me five minutes?” said Edith.

“Certainly,” and he sat down once more.

Edith looked down on the plate before her, and played with a knife. After a pause, she bit her lips, summoned up her determination, and began,

“Leopold, you once loved my sister.”

“Do you wish to insult me, Edith?”

“No, no,” she said hurriedly; and then she continued earnestly, “Oh, Leopold, tell me truly, do you love her still?”

The young man looked at his questioner, then, dropping his eyes to the ground, answered in a low tone of voice,

“I do.”

“Then marry her, Leopold,” cried Edith earnestly. “Oh, marry her. Forget the

past, and live in the future; marry her, Leopold, and love and cherish her and be happy.”

With tears in her eyes, and a dull heavy pain at her heart, the girl pleaded for her sister with all her soul and strength.

Leopold sat back in his chair, his face full of surprise, his hands trembling with excitement.

“You counsel me thus,—*you*!”

“Yes, I, Leopold, who have the greatest right, the only right to speak to you. Yes, I who, five years ago, parted you, as I thought then for ever, now beg you from my soul—to resume your suit.”

There was a silence. The girl looked at Lawson with earnest eyes, and waited with beating heart, and palpitating bosom, for his reply. It came at last.

“Edith,” said Leopold, in a sad low voice, “it is too late! Five years ago I was free, with a bright future before me; now I am

nameless and hopeless, the son of an executed convict."

"No, no."

"But I say yes; why you yourself have reminded me a score of times of my parentage. It is too late—too late!"

"No, no."

"I tell you yes. A legacy has been left me by my dead father, which I *must* fulfil. I am no longer Leopold Lawson, the college lad. I tell you, Edith, that the lad died in giving birth to Richard Harwood, the avenger." He spoke solemnly, as if he were inspired, and his hand was raised to heaven.

"Oh, Leopold, pause a moment, for *her* sake pause. Give up this dreadful scheme. Leave the guilty to God. She loves you with all a woman's love! Don't cast her off. Look in the glass, see what despair has done for you,—how it has marked your face with misery. Look, Leopold, look, and find in the sad, sad sight some hope, some pity

for her.” Again she spoke with all the earnestness of her soul. Poor woman! Every word she uttered caused her a pang, but she endured the torture bravely, firm in her noble love, faithful to the last to her sublime self-sacrifice. Poor woman, a thousand times poor woman!

Leopold rose, and paced the room hurriedly. “I cannot bear it; the trial is too great,” he said; and then he raised his eyes to heaven, and cried, “O Lord, thine be the vengeance, not mine!”

In a moment she had guessed his meaning. She bounded to the window with a sigh of relief, threw it open, and rushed to join her sister. After awhile the two girls entered the room together.

Edith was very pale as she took Florence’s hand in hers,—pale, deadly pale.

“Dear sister,” she said in a low, sorrowful tone, “it was I who parted you. It was I who turned your heart against him. I

was wrong, darling—wrong—very wrong. Forgive me, darling, forgive me !”

And she burst out crying. In a moment Florence’s arm was round her sister’s neck, and her lips were kissing her poor wet cheek. For a moment only, and then Leopold and Florence were alone.

“ Florence !”

It was enough. She understood all he would say, all he would explain. She flew into his arms, and their lips met in a long embrace. And then her head rested on his shoulder, and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

“ My darling !” she cried ; “ oh, my darling !”

She was quieter by-and-by, and then they began to prattle, as lovers will, about this and that, and a score of things. Soon the smiles wreathed round Florence’s cherry lips, and her voice was full of joyous laughter.

“My darling!” she said after awhile, “how shall we break it to uncle?”

A shadow crossed Leopold’s handsome features; but he kissed her fondly, and replied, “Tell me, my own one, can you really love me,—the son of—”

She shuddered and put her hand before his mouth, and cried, “Oh, Leopold, my darling! forget the dreadful past. Live but in the present,—in the happy future. You are known here to all as Richard Harwood; bury Lawson for ever, and live a new, new life of happiness and joy. The past is only a fearful dream; let the future be a glorious reality.”

He smiled sadly, and looked into her blue eyes.

Again her arms were twined about his neck, and their lips met in a long and deep embrace. She started away from him as she heard a footstep on the floor. It was Freddy’s.

“Dear me!” he said, with his glass in his eye, “I hope I am not intruding. Awfully sorry if I am; only no fishing to-day.”

Holston was certainly not at his ease, although he tried to appear so. He had seen Florence in the arms of Leopold, and his heart was full of jealousy and anger. He rather liked the girl, and was deeply in love with her money; hence his emotion. Florence, flushed and happy, without a word of explanation tripped from the room.

There was an awkward pause, and then Freddy said,

“Not fair, by Jove, Harwood. You have been making the running, and you know you’ve been poaching over my preserves. Not fair, by Jove!”

“Do you mean to tell me,—do you dare to tell me, Holston, that you cared anything for the young lady (who has just consented to be my wife) before you came here? Do you dare to tell me so, when you know that

the locket on your watch-chain contains the picture of—”

“Oh, never mind,” said Freddy, with a wave of his hand. “Don’t let’s discuss the matter further. You say she is to be your wife, that’s enough for me. Sorry, I am sure, to have broken in upon so pleasant a *tête-à-tête*. I shouldn’t, only there was a man asking for you in the hall, and I thought I would tell you,—that’s all.”

After a little unimportant conversation the two young men parted. As Leopold left the room Freddy murmured, “Ah, the game’s not played out yet, my fine fellow. If you knew women as well as I do, you would not be so confident of your victory. We shall see, we shall see!”

As for Lawson, he raised his eyes and gave thanks to Heaven.

“Oh,” he murmured, “how happy I am! —a long life of love and hope. O Lord, vengeance be thine, not mine!” He re-

peated this over and over again, as if in justification of something.

When he reached the hall, he found a man waiting for him. As the fellow's back was turned towards him, he could not see his face, so he addressed him thus:—

“My name is Harwood,—I believe you wish to see me?”

“Yes, Sir, I do!”

Leopold fell back, and his face became an ashy white as he recognized Barman.

“What do you want here?” he whispered.

“Why, Sir, you don't look over-pleased to see me. But let that, pass,—I've found a clue to the murder. Your father was innocent, and I know the name of the real assassin—the man (mark me) who hanged him!”

“Whom do you suspect?” asked Leopold, in an awe-stricken whisper, and with a glance round the hall of fear and dismay.

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“I don’t *suspect* any one,” said the detective decisively.

“Whom do you accuse?”

A pause, and then came the ready words—

“Sir Ralph Ruthven, the Baronet !”

End of Book II.

The Story.

BOOK III.—“FRAILTY, THY NAME IS WOMAN !”

CHAPTER I.

OFF THE SCENT !

BEAUTIFUL summer weather at Stelstead. The little churchyard was covered with green grass, and shadowed by widely-spreading trees. Ivy was growing up the low stone walls, and moss was lying untouched and unregarded on the old, old tombstones, and the sun was tinging the village spire with rays of molten gold. Beautiful weather ; why even the newly-made grave in the pauper part of the cemetery looked warmer and less desolate than of yore. Yes, even that poor resting-place of a far poorer woman shone brightly in the sunbeams.

Emma Barlow was dead and buried ; that was the reason of the newly-made grave in the paupers' part of Stelstead churchyard. The old woman had asked to lie near her daughter. But alas ! she was a Roman Catholic, and poor ; so they buried her in unconsecrated ground, like a dog or a cat or a Methodist. The parish was wont to sort out its dead, and gave *her* a place among the heathen. This little matter was surely very creditable to the parish authorities, for was not their conduct calculated to save trouble on the day of judgment ? Of course it was. So let us be joyful and exceeding glad, and give thanks to the churchwardens, and sing psalms and hymns of praise in honour of the vestry.

The Ruthven Arms had been freshly painted, and looked all the better for the renovation. The landlord of the Ruthven Arms had been freshly married, and was of course extremely happy ; all married men

are happy—very happy. He was seated in the coffee-room of his tavern on this particular day, and was conversing affably with his only guest,—John Barman, the detective.

“No, Sir,” said the host of the Ruthven Arms in answer to a question that had evidently been put to him. “No, Sir; Mr. Harwood hasn’t been here yet for you.”

“He’s after his time,” murmured Barman surlily. “He said eleven, and now it’s nearly twelve.”

“Beg your pardon, Sir,” began the host again; “hope I’m not taking a liberty, but I should very much like to ask you a question. Always do ask this question of gents staying at my hotel.”

“Fire away, then,” replied the detective with increased surliness.

“Well, Sir; you see that young woman in the bar, Sir, with the blue ribbons in her cap, and the red pimple on her nose. My

wife, Sir. Beg pardon, Sir; hope I'm taking no liberties, Sir; but what do you think of her, Sir?"

"Don't like her," growled the detective.

"Strange coincidence, Sir; but," and the publican lowered his voice to a confidential whisper, "to tell you the truth, Sir, *no more do I!*"

With this gallant remark, the host of the Ruthven Arms disappeared. Barman walked up and down the coffee-room angrily, approaching every now and then the one little window of the apartment, out of which he peered most impatiently.

"I don't understand him," he murmured with a frown. "On my soul I don't understand him. Here, I have got this case, as it were, in a nutshell. I never did see such a beautiful beginning; caught the clue at once, as neat as a whistle. And now, when I bring him my first fact, my virgin bit of evidence, as I may call it,—as fresh a bit of

evidence as a budding blush rose, and twice as sweet; and now, I say, when I does all this, he just gives me the cold shoulder up at the Hall, and makes an appointment with me down here, which, mind you, he goes and misses! Oh, I don't understand him; he's beyond *me*!"

And the detective resumed his angry promenade. By-and-by the shadow of a man fell upon the floor, and a heavy footstep was heard in the passage.

"At last," said the detective, "at last he's come."

But Barman's lucky star had evidently neglected to put in an appearance on this particular morning; at least, if we may say so on the ground that he gave an angry shrug of his impatient shoulders as the new-comer entered the room.

"The fresh arrival was a little old man with a perfectly bald head, an iron-grey moustache, and a bushy imperial. He was

under five feet in height, but made up for what he lacked in stature by breadth round the waist. He was nearly as broad as he was long.

To make a clean breast of it, I may say at once that he was fat.

The little old man sat down with much dignity, and rang the bell. Until it was answered he employed his time in staring haughtily at the detective.

“What may you want, gentlemen?” asked the landlord putting his head into the room.

“I want some bread, ah! and some cheese, ah! and some of your best, your *very* best cider,” replied the little old man pompously.

The landlord regarded him with a perplexed smile for a moment, and then left the room to obey his stern commands. The little old man frowned once more at the detective.

“Ah!” he began by-and-by, clearing his

throat, "I perceive, Sir, that you don't recognize me."

"No, I don't," returned John Barman shortly. "No, I don't."

"Strange," murmured the little old man. "Strange, and such is fame. I walk through a village in England, my native country,—mind you, not in the wide outside world, but in England, where I was born,—and in the principal hotel of this village I find myself absolutely unknown ! Possibly you've never seen my photograph."

"No, I haven't," Barman answered surlily.

"Very strange, *very* strange indeed !" continued the little old man in a tone of voice that suggested he was studying an interesting but intricate problem. "Very strange, *indeed*. And you, my good man, I have no doubt that if the truth were told, even *you* don't know who I am ?"

This was addressed to the landlord, who

returned at this moment with the comestibles that the little old man had ordered. The host of the Ruthven Arms admitted his ignorance.

“And such is fame!” exclaimed the great unknown. “Why, I am Jones, the Poet!”

As both detective and landlord seemed to be not very greatly impressed by this solemn announcement, the little old man continued,

“Yes, you see before you Jones, the Poet!—the man of whom the ‘Loamshire Times’ has said ‘his *calibre* is just that of his warmest admirers. He is neither above them nor below them. His sentiments, like his style, are on a dead level with theirs.’ You see before you a great man, but a neglected one. The peer of Shakespeare and Dryden. And yet they won’t recognize me, absolutely won’t recognize me! There isn’t a statue of me in the land, and when I asked for a pension from the Government, they wouldn’t give it to me. But there, just

listen to this, and say what you think of it. It was written by a very dear friend of mine." He fumbled in his pocket, and produced a sheet of paper, from which he read, in an emphatic voice, the following lines :—

" Can nought be done for POET JONES,
About his hard-won Pension ?
He has some *Friends* in Parliament,
Their Names we now may mention.

LORD JAMES, of Grafton Hall, has been
For many years his Friend,
And up unto the present time,
Read all the Books he's penn'd ;

And Loamshire's DUKE did confess
The Poet's Books had read ;
And hence who pleases noblemen,
He should be cloth'd and fed ?

'Tis sweet to make a heavy heart
Rejoice and sing for joy ;
'Tis sweet to act a Christian's part,
Such deeds your love employ.

Then say, shall Poet Jones rejoice,
Nor pine in poverty ?
And thank you while he hands your Names
Down to Posterity !"

After he had finished the touching poem, great Jones returned the precious document back into his pocket, and asked the landlord how far Stelstead lay from Chelmsford.

“A little better than twelve miles,” replied the landlord. “You had better stay here to-night, Sir. Very comfortable beds, Sir.”

“Stay here, man ! Where I find myself absolutely unknown !” exclaimed the Poet indignantly. “No, Sirrah. I cannot live or breathe where I am not appreciated. Oh, that Shakespeare were here, that I might whisper into his ear, as he sat listening at my feet, the following words, the work of a contemporary poet :—

“ ‘ Soon shall the shades of Poets that have been
Regret their misspent lives upon the earth,
And of small worth
Count all their works, I ween,
In so great light as thine, O Northern Star ;
And from afar,
In melancholy groans,

From Hades where their restless spirits are,
Pope, Dryden, Keats, and Byron shall be heard,
 With many moans
 And self-reproaching word,
 And their broadcast-sown weeds,
With which they did awhile mislead mankind.
While in the darkness with remorseful mind,
The ghost of mighty Shakespeare tears his hair !
 And in sublime despair
Great Milton heaves a deep sepulchral swear !”

With this magnificent outburst of thrilling song, the Poet paid his score, and departed.

The detective was once more left alone, but not for long. As the clock struck twelve, Leopold Lawson entered the room, and threw himself into a chair with a slight nod at Barman.

“ Now,” said he, “ I am here. What do you want to tell me ?”

“ You’ve come at last, Sir,” said Barman surlily.

“ Yes,” replied Leopold coldly ; “ I have come at last. Sorry to have kept you waiting, but I couldn’t be here before.”

“It strikes me, Sir, that you are losing interest in this here case,—that you’re—”

“I have not come here, Mr. Barman, to join in desultory conversation,” interrupted Leopold. “Be good enough to confine yourself to your business.”

The detective looked up at his employer with an angry glance, paused for a moment, and then began his story.

“Well, Sir, from what you told me of Dixon, I guessed that from him I should get a clue to the murderer. I had heard that he lived a roaring life, much beyond the means of an Auditor-in-Chief of the Paupers’ Property Office (for although Auditor-in-Chief sounds very big, it means only two hundred a year), and I know from experience that roaring life means money at seventy per cent. So off I goes to Mr. Moses Melchisideck, and asks a few questions.”

Barman, who had spoken this with great

rapidity, paused for a moment to take breath. Leopold, who had tried hard to appear unconcerned at the story, could not suppress at this point an impatient "Well?"

"Ah! you may well say 'Well,' Sir," began the detective again. "It *was* well, very well,—capital! I found that Mr. Cumberland Kenny, *alias* Dixon, in his attempts to keep on roaring, had forged your name, Sir, to a bill for £50!"

"Indeed!"

"Using some of the money you placed to my account, Sir, before leaving town, I bought that bill, and went to the Paupers' Property Office. My name was a good introduction, and the forged bill a better. In about five minutes me and Mr. Cumberland Kenny was a-chatting quite affably. He told me everything."

"Yes?"

"First he told me," said the detective, rolling out the words slowly and with

gusto, "about the night of the murder. About how he was called out of bed, and looked at his watch, and it had stopped; how he went near the hall clock, and found it was only eleven; how he set the watch by the clock; how the next morning he found the watch and clock of a different mind; the watch was two hours slow."

"Well, there is nothing in that. The man was half asleep; he might easily have made a mistake in the time."

"Stop a bit, Sir; that's not nearly all I've got to tell you. When I heard this I said 'fishy,' but nothing more. Now comes another point. He swears he never heard any report of firearms after he was called up,—therefore the pistol must have been fired before Sir Ralph came to his room."

"Not necessarily," said Leopold.

"Well, Sir, I have not done yet. About six months ago he found a letter in the hall at the Manor House. It was signed by

Raymond, and addressed to Lady Ruthven !”

When Leopold heard this he turned quite faint, and his face became as white as marble.

“Take some brandy, Sir,” said Barman, noticing the young man’s emotion ; “it will do you good.”

Lawson swallowed a wineglassful of the spirit, and murmured, “The letter I lost, it must have been the letter I lost ! I, then, was the cause of Raymond’s murder !”

“Well, Sir,” continued the detective, when Leopold had somewhat recovered ; “well, Sir, our friend Dixon (who has a head, mind you, on his shoulders) goes to Sir Ralph, shows him the letter, adds up two and two together, makes them four, and gives him a bit of his mind. Sir Ralph (who has *not* a head on his shoulders) gets nervous, and tries to shut Dixon’s mouth by giving him an appointment under Govern-

ment. Conclusion: Dixon unscrupulous, hall clock traitorous, and Sir Ralph murderous. And now, Sir, what do you think of it?"

"What do I think of it?" exclaimed Leopold, speaking with well-assumed calmness; "why I think that you have done nothing, Mr. Barman,—absolutely nothing. You have not a tittle of proof. What do I think of it?—why this, that you have completely failed in your purpose, and that, having failed, it is useless to continue the search any further. Be kind enough to let me have your account, and I will send you a cheque for the amount I am indebted to you. Good morning."

Leopold put on his hat and walked out, leaving Barman absolutely fuming with indignation.

"In the whole course of my experience I never heard of such a thing!" he exclaimed angrily. "Why it's absolutely shameful!

It would be a sin to give up such a very interesting case. A most beautiful case, full of artistic feeling,—as nice a murder as ever I came across. What does he mean by it? He's too big a swell to be bribed,—much too big a swell! Then what does he mean by it? I can't make it out. It's disgraceful, it's disgusting, it's ungentlemanly,—it's absolutely unbusiness-like! I'm ashamed of him!"

With much more in this strain Barman put on his hat, and prepared to take a stroll. As he was going out, his eye caught the looking-glass. He stopped, and stood before it.

"John Barman," said he, addressing his reflection in the mirror, "you are a determined man, and have been a determined man ever since I have had the pleasure of knowing you. John Barman, Sir, you've got your heart in your profession, Sir. The Raymond murder is a most beautiful case,

and oughtn't to be allowed to wither. Take my advice, Sir. Go on with that case, Sir, to the very end. Will you, Sir?"

John Barman and his reflection in the glass bowed to one another.

"That's right. Is it settled?"

Once more the bow was repeated.

"It is settled!"

"Come, that's hearty."

And with a parting nod to the looking-glass, the detective opened the door and left the room.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE SCENT !

JAS SAMSON, the cobbler, was hard at work in his little shop. The old man was sad, a shadow rested on his brow, no pleasant smile played about his lips, and his labour was performed in silence. He was grieved at something or about somebody ; this was evident to those who watched him as they passed by. Lubberly labourers and shock-headed "chawbacons" appeared and disappeared, and the sound of their iron-shod boots began gently, grew louder, and died away in the distance. At length, however,

a man of a better class drew near, and, leaning upon the low door of the shop, gave the old cobbler "good-day."

"Ah, Mr. Leopold, is it you?" said Samson, looking up from his work. "It's some time since I saw you last."

The young man blushed, and excused himself on the score of business, and then they both were silent. The senior and the junior seemed to be embarrassed; they "hem'd" and "ha'd," and neither felt inclined to commence a fresh conversation. At length Leopold plucked up courage, and with his eyes cast to the ground, said in a low voice,

"I suppose you've heard the news, Jas?"

The cobbler nodded, and went on with his work.

"Yes, Mr. Leopold, I've heard the news. We've not much to talk about in the village, and the news was all over the place last night."

“Don’t you congratulate me?”

“Yes, my dear boy; I wish you all the happiness in the world; from the very bottom of my heart, I do;” and the old man stretched forth his hand, and pressed the palm extended towards him.

“Jas,” said Leopold, with his eyes still cast towards the ground, “I’ve given up my vow. I’ve no scheme of vengeance now.”

“And quite right too, my lad,” replied Samson, with a sudden return of a little of his old heartiness. “Quite right, too, my lad. It is not for *you* to punish—you to avenge while there’s a Heaven (a just Heaven and a merciful Heaven, mind you) above us.”

“I shall see you again, Jas, before I go up to London,” said Lawson after a pause. “You *do* congratulate me?”

“My dear boy, your happiness is mine;” again the two palms returned a mutual pres-

sure. Leopold lingered a moment, and was gone.

And then the cobbler heaved a heavy sigh, and commenced with feverish eagerness to work once more. Not for long. After ten minutes' toil, he was interrupted by the sound of a strange voice—a voice he had never listened to before.

“Mr. Samson, isn't it?” began the newcomer.

“That's my name; what's yours?”

“Well, it's no good my telling you,” replied the stranger, who was none other than John Barman, the detective; “I might tell you lies, you know. How could you know I was speaking the truth?”

“By looking you in the face,” said Samson, with a contemptuous glance—a glance which meant disgust, hatred, distrust, and a host of feelings more. “That's how *I* tell an honest man.”

“Well, call me Mr. Brown; how will that name suit you?”

“As well as another,—no better, no worse.”

“That’s right. May I light a cigar? You don’t mind the sulphur?”

“No; I’m used to it. So will you be one day.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the detective; “why, Mr. Samson, you are quite a wit. ‘Grow used to the sulphur;’ oh, it’s capital!”

“Yes; but you didn’t come here to tell me that. What do you want, Mr. Brown?”

“Why,” said the detective, leaning over the door in a confidential manner, “they tell me, down in the village, that you are one of the most influential people in these parts. They say that you know almost everything; that you are quite a historian.”

“Oh! they say all that, do they?”

“That they do, Sir, and more.”

“It’s very kind of them; thank ’em for me.”

“Well, Mr. Samson,” continued Barman,

not in the least daunted by the hostile spirit in which his advances had been received, "I am a sort of a writer myself, a literary man, and I want to know something about the history of Stelstead. Now can't you assist me?"

Jas looked up sharply at his questioner, and then answered sullenly, "No, I can't."

"Really! well now that *is* unlucky! Couldn't you tell me, for instance, when that church was built?"

"No."

"Or when the Manor House was altered?"

"No."

"Or about the Stelstead murder?"

"Well, yes; I might tell you something about *that*."

"Really, my dear Sir, nothing could be more fortunate. They say about these parts that justice made a mistake in that there case: that the wrong man was hanged."

“So I have heard.”

“Well, Mr. Samson, couldn’t you throw any light upon the matter?” said Barman impatiently. “To tell you the truth, I am a detective from London, and—”

“Oh! are you indeed?” answered the old cobbler very calmly; “well, then, take my advice, get to work, and leave me alone, as you will only be wasting your time in talking to me.”

“Do you know who the real murderer was? They say that you have hinted as much,” cried Barman angrily.

“I don’t say I don’t,” replied the old man with a provoking smile.

“Well, who was he? the law will make you answer.”

“The man who killed George Raymond,” said the cobbler with burlesque solemnity, “was certainly his murderer.”

The detective frowned, and walked off angrily, without bidding the old man good-day.

“Let the past bury the past,” said Samson to himself, as Barman disappeared.

In the meanwhile, the detective walked towards the Ruthven Arms. As he entered the hotel, he met Leopold escorting a young lady. He removed his hat as the pair passed, and stood looking after them.

“Who is that female?” said he to the landlord, pointing towards the girl.

“That *female!*” echoed the host of the Ruthven Arms in deep disgust. “Why, that’s Miss Florence, the niece of Sir Ralph. They say that she’s to marry the young gentleman from London with the white hair and the large fortune.”

“Oh!” said Barman; and then the detective indulged in a long low whistle of great meaning. This done and he seemed much relieved.

“Now I understand why Mr. Lawson is so lukewarm about the Raymond murder,” he murmured to himself. “But it won’t

choke *me* off. You see, there's such a difference between us. I'm an artist, and he's only a lover!"

The contempt with which he uttered the last word would have made Venus cry, and have killed little Cupid outright, had those two celebrated celestials been present to listen to him!

* * * * *

That evening the detective travelled by the train from Chelmsford to London. As John Barman was not very proud, and certainly not particularly rich, he patronized the third-class carriages. He had but one fellow-passenger—a poor clergyman in a threadbare coat, who every now and again looked up from the book he was attempting to read by the feeble light of the carriage-lamp, and peered curiously at his companion's face.

"Isn't your name Barman?" at last said the parson, addressing the detective.

"Yes, Sir, that's my name," was the reply.

“I thought I knew you. For many years I was chaplain to —— Gaol, and I remember your face thoroughly well as a frequent witness for the prosecution.”

“Ah, Sir!” returned Barman with a sigh of deep regret, “those *were* times! Crime was something like crime in those days. Now the service (begging your honour’s pardon) is going absolutely to the devil. Murders are as scarce as oysters, and I haven’t had a really good divorce case for nearly three months!”

“Well, you can scarcely expect me to mourn with you over that fact,” said the poor clergyman with a smile. “But I trust that where you *have* had a chance of assisting justice, you have been fortunate in attaining your object.”

“Well, pretty well, Sir. I’ve got a nice little job on hand now—just now. As pretty a murder, Sir, as ever you’d wish to see, Sir. The case is beautifully complete. A perfect gem!”

“Where did it take place?”

“At Stelstead, Sir. I think they hanged the wrong man for the job,—a party of the name of Lawson.”

“Lawson!” cried the parson. “Why, I attended him before his execution. Ah, I could tell you a story about that poor man!”

“Voluntary contributions always thankfully received, Sir,” said the detective in reply.

“Well, I think I may be able to help you a little, but you must promise me, on your word of honour, to keep secret what I reveal to you.”

“You know me, Sir, and you may rely upon me.”

“I think I can;” and the clergyman lowered his voice almost into a whisper, and commenced his story.

At Shoreditch the two men separated. They both looked very grave. As the

clergyman shook hands with his quasi-travelling companion, he said,

“I have your word?”

Barman bowed, and when the parson had gone, hailed a cab, and drove off.

“It’s a painful business,” he said to himself, “and I wish I had never undertaken it.” After a while he murmured, “Be a man, John Barman; be a man. You’re an artist, and if you give up the scent before your prey is hounded down, I will never respect you more. Be a man, I say; be a man.”

For all this, he sighed as he entered his rooms in the King’s Road, Chelsea, and exclaimed,

“Poor fellow! poor fellow!”

CHAPTER III.

ONLY A WOMAN!

FLORENCE was strolling under the trees in Stelstead Park. Her pretty mouth was pouting, and her pretty eyes were full of tears. She was emphatically "cross." Leopold had that morning gone back to London, and she was left alone.

"He can't love me as much as he should," she sobbed out, "or he wouldn't run away so soon. Oh, I knew he never, never could forgive me!" and she sat down beneath the branches of an oak, and indulged in what ladies call a "good cry." Very stupid,

some of my readers will say. Granted; and let it here be clearly set down, Florence is not an angel, and never has been. If any artist has painted her as one, he has done very wrong, indeed; and I take this opportunity of protesting most strongly against the introduction of her wings. My heroine (if Florence *is* my heroine) is very pretty and “taking,” but she has her failings. What girl has not? And if she turns out cold and cruel and heartless, it’s not my fault. She’s only a woman, and we men must make allowances for her! So to continue. As she sat thus crying beneath the old oak-tree, the shadow of a man fell upon the grass right before her. In a moment Florence’s tears were dried up, and she conjured up a smile to her flushed features.

“I am glad to find you alone,” said a sad voice, as the girl sprang to her feet. “I have something to say to you before we part.”

It was Freddy — Freddy, elegant and

solemn,—Freddy, in his favourite part of the disappointed cynic and broken-hearted lover.

“You are going, too, Mr. Holston?”

“Yes, I am going,” returned the young man, smoothing his auburn moustache, and making good use of his large grey eyes. “You know as well as I do that I cannot stay after what has passed. It would be too painful for both of us.”

“Both of us?”

“Yes, both of us. Oh, don’t explain. I know well enough why you have thrown me over, and accepted Harwood. I know that duty, and not your heart, dictated the bargain, and I respect you for it,—yes, respect and honour you for it.”

“Mr. Holston, I cannot listen to such words.”

“Forgive me, I can appreciate your motives. They do you honour. I can quite forgive you, and I do forgive you from my

heart. It was your sense of duty, and I am the last man in the world to overlook such true nobility. I know I am frivolous, and some people consider me a mere man of the world; but you, Florence (you *must* let me call you Florence, for auld lang syne), have taught me how to feel. The past is the past; I can never have a future."

"If I led you to believe, Mr. Holston, I am very sorry—"

"Don't say you're sorry, Florence," interrupted Freddy in the same lachrymose strain. "Don't say you're sorry, for you should not be sorry. You've done your duty, and it is very noble of you. You've driven me to a premature but thoroughly welcome grave, and I forgive you from my heart. I can bear it, but don't tell me after your great, your heroic sacrifice, that you're sorry,—I couldn't bear to hear *that!*"

"But, Mr. Holston, you will not let me explain."

“There is no need of explanation, Florence. Explanation would be too painful, too trying, to both of us. It would not be fair to you, it would not be just to Harwood, it would be cruel to me. No, Florence; we both have a noble path to follow. You must be true to your grand deed of sacrifice, and I—I must go to the dogs, down to the very lowest depths of ruin, happy in the thought that we have both of us, in spite of our hearts’ dearest wishes,—have both of us, I repeat, done our duty!”

“But, Mr. Holston, Mr. Harwood is—”

“Stay, Florence,” cried Freddy again, interrupting her in pathetic and dignified accents; “don’t say cruel words about poor Harwood. It is not his fault, it is the fault of fate. *He* does not separate us, poor fellow! you must not blame him. What we once fondly hoped was not and is not to be. We must not blame poor Harwood. You must try to love him, my dear Florence; it is your duty now.”

“But I do love him, you know I do.”

“I do know, and I respect you deeply for your grand devotion. You must forget me, Florence; it is your duty. If Harwood is cold, you must pardon him. If his soul is not akin to yours, you may perhaps sigh; but you must fight nobly against your dislike, and pardon him. It is your duty, my poor child, and you must play the cruel part even to the bitter end. I will never reproach you; on the contrary, I will be ever ready to give you my sympathy and assistance. You have considered me till now an idle worldling—a mere earthly cynic. From this moment regard me as your friend as I ever have been your slave, your admirer and pitier as I ever have and ever shall be your lover.”

“But I tell you, Mr. Holston, that I love Mr. Harwood; that—”

“Bravely acted, my poor Florence,” again interrupted Freddy; “but this is no time

for acting. There comes an hour when we all of us must throw off the mask, and we neither of us can wear ours now. I shall see you again, when, perhaps, you are *his* bride; but I shall remain the same. You can always count upon me as your firm, devoted friend. And now I must say good-bye."

"But, Mr. Holston,—"

"Do not distress yourself, Florence; we must have met this painful moment, so let us meet it with strong hearts, if with quivering lips and trembling hands. Good-bye, my darling, good-bye!"

And he took her reluctant hand within his own, raised it to his lips, and was gone.

Florence remained in deep thought. She was a silly, wayward girl,—not an angel, not a goddess. What Freddy had just said to her gave her a vague notion that she had done something very noble and extremely grand. She also had an incipient idea that

she was very much to be pitied. Feeling this, she could only do one thing, which she accordingly did.

She sat down under the tree again, and had another "good cry." Freddy, who was in hiding, saw this little performance, and smiled with considerable satisfaction.

"Ah!" said he, as he stole towards her, until his shadow fell upon the weeping, unconscious girl, "the game has still to be played out. Harwood, my fine fellow, you have a good hand, but I don't mind backing my luck against your own."

He stood for a second throwing his dark, threatening shadow over the form of Florence, and then was gone,—this time in sober truth and earnest.

As for Florence, when she had cried herself half dead with grief, she got up from the ground in a better state of mind. A holy calm fell upon her spirit, and she walked towards her home with the air of a martyred

saint. Soon the red rings round her eyes disappeared, and she resumed her wonted liveliness. She laughed and chattered merrily with her sister that evening at dinner, and rattled away at the pianoforte afterwards with wonderful vigour. For all this, she was not *quite* herself. An evil seed had been sown,—only the future could say whether it would bear most bitter fruit. She had fits of silence now and again, which at last became so frequent that Edith asked her anxiously what was the matter.

“Oh, nothing, darling,” she replied; “I was only thinking.”

What?

Why this:

Florence was thinking, “I am a great martyr, and I have performed a very noble action. Leopold ought to be very, *very* grateful for my love.”

Pshaw! I told you that my heroine was no angel. She’s made of clay, dear Sir, or

much respected madam. Pitiful, miserable clay. Love and sorrow may turn that poor contemptible clay into costly china,—who knows? Forgive her, my friends; we mustn't expect too much from her. Remember that the poor creature is only a woman!

CHAPTER IV.

A "LARKY" GENTLEMAN.

IT was at eleven o'clock at Royal Chambers, No. —, St. James's Street. The lodgers (and voters) of that aristocratic, dashing house were beginning to yawn, and were lazily thinking about breakfast. Many of the servants were staggering up and down the broad stone stairs with immense cans of cold water, destined to fill many a matutinal tub. Others were carrying about trays loaded with dainties, fine meats, and steaming pots of coffee, hot fish, and ice-covered butter. All was preparation, for soon Royal

Chambers, No. —, St. James's Street, would be out of bed, making its toilet, and discussing its noonday meal.

In the road the cabs were beginning to appear, among the shops life was commencing to revive, shutters were being taken down, horses were being watered, policemen were being restored (by beer), sentinels were being relieved (by loud-voiced corporals), and the coffee-rooms of the clubs were being thronged by breakfast-eaters. It was certainly hot in St. James's Street, and sunny, but still an air of aristocratic laziness pervaded the fashionable spot. It seemed as if the shopkeepers found it an intolerable bore to make a hundred per cent. profit upon their wares, that the servants found it an intolerable bore to lounge on the steps of the clubs, that the very dogs found it an intolerable bore to bask in the rays of the morning sun. Oh, St. James's Street is a lazy, languid place, especially at eleven o'clock in the morning.

As the bell of the Palace leisurely boomed out the hour, a man walked briskly up the street. There was nothing particular about him. He might have been a clerk, or a duke, or a hangman. Certainly he had sharp, shifty eyes, that looked at everything and everybody with marvellous rapidity. A man that, had he been seen in Fleet Street, would have passed for a speculator, or a stockbroker, or a forger, but examined here in lazy, languid St. James's Street, appeared like a fish out of water. What did he want with his brisk walk and sharp looks, in this quiet hole? So thought the gorgeous hall-porters, as they viewed him wearily from the steps of their respective clubs.

The man did not seem to care very much for the glances of weak indignation and insipid disgust directed towards him as he marched down the pavement. At length, when he had walked for some little distance,

he stopped short, and looked at a number over a doorway.

"This is the place, I suppose," said he, and rang the bell.

No one came, of course; it is a rule in St. James's Street to answer the third summons instead of the first. Nothing daunted, the man seized the handle again and again and again, and with the fourth peal brought up a servant.

"I say," said the footman (he was very *blasé*, and looked like a washed-out dummy from a tailor's shop); "I say, what the doose are you making all this row about, eh? You know it ain't the thing, you know. Not at all the thing."

"Is this Royal Chambers?"

"Why, in course it is! You don't mean to say that you've woke me up to ask me that?"

"Does Mr. Holston live here?"

"Yes, he does; but *you* can't see him.

Law bless you, won't be up for the next two hours. Stop, though; he did say he'd like to see his 'airdresser if he called; he wants his moustache trimmed. I s'pose you don't 'appen to be his 'airdresser?"

"Unluckily not."

"Oh, then, you ain't got a ghost of a chance, not if you were his father himself. Good morning."

"But—"

"Good morning."

But, my man, you surely wouldn't lose half-a-crown?"

"I lose half-a-crown! What d'ye mean?"

"Oh, only this; if you can manage to get me an interview with Mr. Holston, I'll make you a present of one."

The servant reflected a moment, and then said,

"Well, there won't be much 'arm in trying to 'elp you with that?"

"Of course not."

“ But, first of all, you aren’t ’umbugging, are you ?”

“ Not I.”

“ You ain’t a dun or a bum ?”

A shake of the head.

“ Or a begging letter ? It won’t be no matter of use if you are. Why, Holston would see the Benevolent Association for the Relief of Decayed Charwomen to the very doose before he’d stretch out a little finger to ’elp them. You ain’t a decayed charwoman, are yer ?”

The man again shook his head.

“ Will you wait ’ere a minute, and I’ll see what can be done for yer ?”

With this, the footman slowly lounged away. He met a friend on the staircase, and engaged in a desultory conversation with him for some length of time. All things must come to an end, however, sooner or later, even the tittle-tattle of flunkeys, and by degrees our footman at last arrived on the

landing, sacred to Freddy's rooms and presence. But the 'Daily Telegraph' lay on a table outside the door of the chambers, and of course had to be perused before this plush butterfly could think of carrying out his errand. At last the leading articles were disposed of, and the French correspondent admired, and the sporting intelligence literally devoured, and the flunkey was then at liberty to attend to less important matters.

Freddy Holston was fast asleep, when his servant came to pull up his blind, and take away his things for the hands of the brusher. The noise of the roller recalled him to consciousness, and he looked lazily out of bed, and murmured, .

"I say, what's the time?"

"Just gone eleven, Sir."

"All right, call me again at half-past twelve, and don't make such a confounded row."

"Beg your pardon, Sir, but—"

“Get out !” and Freddy turned upon his side, and closed his eyes again.

His servant deliberately took up a pile of boots, and allowed them to drop with a crash to the floor.

“Hang you !” said Freddy angrily ; “ why the deuce don’t you get out ?”

“ Beg your pardon, Sir, but there’s a man waiting in the hall who says he wants to see you.”

“ Hang the man, and you too ; do you think I would talk to a fellow at this hour of the night ?”

“ Beg your pardon, Sir, but he said it was something very important—very important indeed, Sir.”

“ What is the fellow like ?”

“ Well, Sir, he looks respectable ; I should guess he was a gentleman’s servant, who had had a fall in the world, and had come down to be a tutor, or something of that sort.”

“ Not a dun, eh ?”

"No, Sir, he ain't got a good hat enough to be a dun."

"Or a Sheriff's officer?"

"Oh, dear no, Sir,—why, he's as sober as a judge!"

"He said he wanted to see me?"

"Yes, Sir, very pertickler, indeed."

"All right; show him up."

The servant left the room, and Freddy rolled out of bed. The young man plunged into his bath, and went through his ablutions; this done, and in a few minutes he appeared clothed in a gorgeous lounging-suit of brown velvet. He put on a smoking-cap with a gold tassel, and lighted a cigar. By this time his servant had returned and announced the presence of the visitor in the sitting-room.

"Pray take a seat," said Freddy, when he had entered the apartment occupied by his unwelcome guest. "You don't mind smoke?"

“Not a bit, Sir,” answered the man; “rather likes it than otherwise.”

“Have one?” and Freddy held out his cigar-case.

“Thank you kindly, Sir,” said his visitor, helping himself to a regalia, and he forthwith commenced smoking. “You know Mr. Moses Melchisideck, Sir, I think?”

“Oh! you have come about that matter; have you?” cried Freddy with a blank face. “Well, I tell you once for all, I can’t do it. The bill *must* be renewed.”

“I ain’t come about a bill, Sir; and to make it plain sailing, I may as well tell you at once that I am John Barman, the detective, and I have got in hand a case in which I think you can give me some assistance.”

Freddy eyed his visitor with distrust, but continued his smoking.

“To make a long story short, it’s as pretty a murder case as ever you see. Neat, compact, and genteel. I never see such a case before. Why it’s beautiful.”

Barman spoke with genuine enthusiasm.

"I don't see that I can be of any use to you," said Freddy, leisurely puffing away at his cigar; "to the best of my recollection I never committed a murder in my life."

"Ah! I see you're a larky gentleman," observed Barman with a grim smile; "but you just listen here, Sir. See if you can't help me a bit. Mr. Melchisideck told me you were in the house at the time, and I know that you found the pistol. Perhaps you might give me a few hints."

And with this the detective related the story of the murder as he had repeated it to the sceptical Lawson. When he had quite done, he said to Freddy, "Now, Sir, do you remember anything pertickler on that there night, larking apart?"

"Let's see," drawled Holston leisurely; "I woke suddenly, and couldn't get to sleep again. Yes, I remember; and then I went down into the library to get a fresh book.

And I heard the church clock strike two, and by Jove !”

He stopped quite still, as if he had seen a ghost. He put his hand to his head, and stared at Barman with sightless eyes.

“ Well,” said the detective, “ what did you see ?”

“ I saw,” replied Freddy in a dreamy voice, as if he answered against his will, “ I SAW LADY RUTHVEN ALTERING THE HALL-CLOCK FROM TWELVE TO TWO !”

“ By Jove, I thought so !” cried Barman, jumping from his chair. “ I’ve found the missing clue ; my case is complete !”

The excited tone of Barman’s voice recalled Freddy to his wonted composure. He looked at the detective hard in the face, and said,

“ What clue ?”

“ Why, your evidence, to be sure, Sir.”

“ What evidence ?”

“ Why, just what you’ve said.”

"Oh, that's it, is it?" drawled out Freddy, looking at the end of his cigar. "See here, my man; it will be better for both parties that we should understand each other. Now you have stumbled somehow or other (I don't know how) upon a piece of family history. Perhaps you've been paid to go as far as you've gone?" The detective nodded. "Quite so. Now the question is, who will pay you to go further?"

Barman scratched his head, and observed, "Well to tell you the truth, Sir, nobody's paying me just at present. I might say that this here murder case is a bit of luxury. You see, I love my art, and couldn't give it up. It was such a neat case, such a very tasty bit of business. To be frank, Sir, what I have been doing lately is quite *hen hammerter*. Now, I'm not a rich man, and business is business all the world over. Now *you* seem to take to the idea a good deal; would you like to go in for it?"

“My dear Mr. Barman, such a thing is quite out of the question. Ask your friend Mr. Melchisideck about me, and he will tell you that I am as poor as a rat !”

“Sorry to hear it, Sir,” said the detective, rising to take his leave. “Well, Sir, when we want you for that evidence, we will call upon you for it.”

“What evidence ?”

“Why, the evidence you just gave to me.”

“I gave you no evidence.”

The detective stared at Freddy for a moment or so, and then said in measured accents,

“What, Sir ! do you mean to tell me that you would commit perjury in the witness-box ?”

“Quite so, if it suited my purpose to do so. Once for all, then, don’t call me unless I am willing to come, or you will make a mess of it. You see, my dear Sir, I am such ‘a larky gentleman !’ ”

The detective walked out of the room without another word.

As for Freddy, he smiled all over with delight. "I *do* hold a trump card now," said he. "If I don't marry Florence before the month is out, my name is not Frederick Holston."

END OF VOL. II.

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